

**Transforming business students' dominant social paradigm: a case  
study of a Higher Education Institute teaching "New Economy  
Principles"**

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## ABSTRACT

*"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." – Baba Dioum*

*"Humanity's journey through the twenty-first century will be led by the policymakers, entrepreneurs, teachers, journalists, community organisers, activists and voters who are being educated today." (Raworth, 2017)*

Over the last few decades, there has been growing recognition by governments, businesses and citizens that the current model of global economic growth is not sustainable (Fullerton, 2015). Consequently, there has been a move amongst researchers to explore alternative forms of economic systems that will allow humanity to thrive within the means of the planet. One of the biggest obstacles to realising such alternatives is the dominant social paradigm (DSP) based on an economic mindset 1950's textbooks, which are themselves rooted in the theories of 1850 (Raworth, 2017). This DSP has led people to believe in the insatiability of human needs that can only be met by relentless economic growth, of which the negative side effects are unavoidable. This DSP has infiltrated many institutions that are responsible for the socialisation of twenty-first century future leaders – from families to higher education institutes (HEIs). In this study, I examined a private HEI whose espoused values and marketed graduate attributes claim to challenge this DSP by graduating brand professionals who seek to create meaningful, conscientious brands that take total responsibility for their actions and are purpose not profit driven. The objective of this study was to explore how successful this HEI was at instilling these values in its students so that they will behave differently in the future and to uncover what aspects of the educational experience were particularly effective/ineffective at doing so. This study took a qualitative, exploratory approach and data was collected in the form of twenty-one face-to-face interviews with third-year students and two email questionnaires from alumni. The findings indicated that students had an awakened consciousness and conscience with respect to reductive acts of labelling someone as "other" and this affected how they intended to behave differently towards others and in how they valued themselves. This type of consciousness paired with action is critical for the success of a new economy. This change came about primarily due to the non-discipline related subjects of Critical Studies and Creative Development, which introduced students to the concept of "othering"; the engagement with diversity, which occurred in formal ways in class and informally in a social contexts; and the institutional culture of the HEI, which celebrates the value of diversity. Where students were lacking new economy competencies was in their inability to envision humans as anything other than Homo economicus – people could be black, white, pink or purple but, particularly within the context of business, they could not be anything other than rational, calculating, self-interested beings. Students have been personally exposed to other types of diversity, but they have had little exposure to the theory or reality of Homo heuristics, Homo reciprocans, Homo altruisticus or Homo socialis. This study therefore motivates the need for further research to explore other ways that students can be conscientised to alternative ways of being in an economic sense.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
2.1 A new economy .....	4
2.1.1 History of the new economy movement .....	6
2.1.2 What do supporters of the new economy movement hope to achieve? .....	9
2.1.3 Where change needs to happen .....	10
2.1.4 Criticism of the new economy movement .....	14
2.2 Why higher education? .....	16
2.2.1 What could “timely wisdom” be in higher education? .....	18
2.2.2 What should HEIs be doing? .....	21
2.2.3 Affective learning .....	22
2.2.4 What are the challenges to making this happen .....	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	29
3.1 Introduction .....	29
3.2 Research approach .....	29
3.3 The setting .....	31
3.4 Data sources .....	32
3.5 Data collection .....	33
3.6 Data analysis .....	34
3.7 Study limitations .....	37
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....	38
4.1 Theme 1: Awakened consciousness and conscience .....	38
4.2 Theme 2: Self-discovery .....	45
4.3 Theme 3: Motivations .....	48
4.4 Theme 4: New economy limiting beliefs .....	53
4.5 Theme 5: Coping mechanisms .....	58
4.6 Theme 6: Freedom to find meaning .....	61
4.7 Theme 7: Challenge me to rise to expectations .....	62
4.8 Theme 8: Relationship with lecturers .....	63
4.9 Theme 9: Smaller classes .....	64
4.10 Theme 10: Delivering aha! moments .....	65

4.11 Theme 11: Engagement with diversity .....	70
4.12 Theme 12: Institute examples .....	70
4.13 Theme 13: External influences .....	73
4.14 Chapter summary .....	75
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>77</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	77
5.2 Awakened consciousness and conscience .....	80
5.3 Self-discovery .....	84
5.4 Motivations .....	87
5.5 Limiting beliefs.....	92
5.6 Coping mechanisms .....	96
5.7 Enabling factors.....	96
5.8 Chapter summary .....	97
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>99</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	99
6.2 Practical recommendations for HEIs .....	101
6.3 Further research .....	102
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>115</b>
Appendix A: The six Principles of Responsible Management Education .....	115
Appendix B: Student interview schedule .....	116
Appendix C: Table of codes .....	118
Appendix D: Business model .....	120

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATTANE	African Transition to a New Economy
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DESD	Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
DSP	Dominant Social Paradigm
EFS	Education for Sustainability
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEI	Higher Education Institute
PRME	Principles of Responsible Management Education
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development



## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Old economy vs new economy beliefs .....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Table 2: Old economy vs new economy values .....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Table 3: The new economy leader .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Table 4: Summary of education methods for sustainability/new economics .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 5: Overview of data sources .....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Table 6: Degrees represented by data .....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Table 7: Example 1 of first order coding in students words.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Table 8: Example 2 of first order coding in students words.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Table 9: Research question one themes.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Table 10: Research question two themes .....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Table 11: Snapshot of new and old economy beliefs held by study participants .....</i>	<i>98</i>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*“I see two possible futures. In one, a technocratically-empowered youth have enough agency and ethical nous to interpret leadership as a form of limited and selfless service. In the other, these same people instead use their agency to entrench and reinforce inequality through more sophisticated and resilient means, and in so doing ossify various undesirable post-colonial practices of governance”* (Makeka, 2016).

Over the last few decades, there has been growing recognition by governments, businesses and citizens that the current model of global economic growth is not sustainable (Fullerton, 2015). In his 2008 creative capitalism speech at the World Economic Forum, Bill Gates acknowledged that although there have been incredible advancements in the world, this progression has often heightened inequality between those who benefit from the resulting growth and those who suffer the negative consequences of it (Gates, 2008). Oxfam’s recently released report, “Reward Work, Not Wealth”, indicated that eighty-two per cent of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest one per cent of the global population, while the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world saw no increase in their wealth (Kilian, 2018). The same is true in South Africa where the top ten per cent of South African society receives half of all wage income, while the bottom fifty per cent of the workforce receives just twelve per cent of all wages (“South Africa’s richest”, 2018). Oxfam executive director, Winnie Byanyima, said that “the billionaire boom is not a sign of a thriving economy but a symptom of a failing economic system” (“Richest 1% made 82% of wealth created”, 2018). Siphokazi Mthathi, Oxfam South Africa executive director, elaborated that while the economic situation in South Africa does indeed have historical roots, the neoliberal economic framework adopted post-1994 “could only produce a scenario where those who are already privileged, have the most capital, and have the most control over the economy have continued to grow at the expense of the poor and working people” (Kilian, 2018).

Beyond inequality, research shows that neoliberal market economics, which is based on the idea of “endless resources on an infinite planet”, is looking evermore likely to be driving climate change and global warming (Kings, 2017). The South African city of Cape Town, home to 3.7 million people, is currently facing the risk of being the first major modern city to run out of water (“Cape Town held up as example of climate change disaster at WEF”, 2018). The water scarcity that Cape Town is experiencing is partly as a result of the worst drought in living memory (human-made climate change?) and is likely to affect those on the bottom of the socio-economic ladder most, while those who can afford it are drilling boreholes (Merten, 2018).

Out of the seemingly intractable problems presented by extreme inequality, large scale conflict, climate change, environmental degradation and the list goes on, comes hope in the shape of a “new economy movement” based on principles that contrast with the increasingly criticized conventional economic approach (Robertson, 1997). These principles are along the following lines:

- *“systematic empowerment of people as the basis for people-centred development;*
- *systematic conservation of resources and environment, as the basis for environmentally sustainable development;*
- *evolution from a ‘wealth of nations’ model of economic life to a one-world model, and from today’s international economy to an ecologically sustainable, decentralising, multi-level one-world economic system;*
- *restoration of political and ethical factors to a central place in economic life and thought;*
- *respect for qualitative values, not just quantitative values;*
- *respect for feminine values, not just masculine ones”* (Robertson, 1997).

“Creative capitalism” (Gates, 2008), “the solidarity economy”, “the circular economy”, a “wellbeing economy”(Fioramonti 2017) and “regenerative capitalism” (Fullerton, 2015) are terms and ideas that, although slightly different in implementation, are all being discussed under this greater umbrella of “new economics” as possible alternative models “to place the well-being of people and the planet at the centre of the economic development” (Amis, n.d.). Why, if it is so evident that our current model is not working, is change not happening faster? Why isn’t everyone “getting with the programme” so to speak? Tideman, Arts & Zandee (2013) point to the reliance of political and economic leaders on limited assumptions about the nature of the economic, social and ecological reality and the drivers of human behaviour. They suggest that in order for leaders to break away from “business as usual” there needs to be a “change in the way we think”.

Thankfully, as a new generation of people enter society as contributing individuals, they bring with them the possibility for adoption of a new mindset (Mannheim, 1952).

*“In particular, the potential for change is concentrated in the cohorts of young adults who are old enough to participate directly in the movements impelled by change, but not old enough to have become committed to an occupation, a residence, a family of procreation or a way of life. Furthermore the fact of change facilitates their development of other orientations than those of their parents and their community”* (Ryder, 1965).

Higher education institutes (HEIs) are perfectly placed at this intersection in the lives of the new generation of future global citizens. Therefore, they have the potential to cultivate the “shift in business thinking, mind-sets and awareness, hence an evolved type of consciousness, with an appropriate skill set derived from this consciousness” (Tideman et al, 2013), which is required for a new economy to grow and flourish.

Despite being recognised as having an important role in promoting sustainability; previous studies have shown that although some examples of well-designed education for sustainability (EFS) initiatives exist, many who graduate from HEIs around the world lack sufficient knowledge about

environmental issues, and that their undergraduate studies do not affect their attitudes about sustainability (Mintz & Tal, 2014).

In this research I have identified an HEI, Vega School (henceforth known as Vega), which does indeed profess to create citizens who think differently, specifically a generation of graduates that believe:

- that the only meaningful social, cultural and economic exchange is that which adds value to the lives of all people;
- that the only meaningful brands are those that live this purpose by taking total responsibility for every decision they make;
- in being conscientious and committed to social justice; and
- in being enterprising, innovative and using their tech-savvy to be tech-smart by leveraging the power of technology to add value to society.

The above graduate attributes provide an orienting statement of education outcomes and should be used to inform Vega's curriculum design and the provision of learning experiences offered by Vega (Sin & McGuigan, 2013). However, most universities make some sort of public graduate attribute claim but few can provide convincing evidence of curricula that comprehensively and systematically develop these abilities (Sin & McGuigan, 2013).

According to a UNESCO report reflecting on a decade of progress on EFS, environmental and sustainability education is being increasingly connected to education and learning sciences, whereas it once was more limited to the sciences of ecology, nature conservation, and sustainability (Wals, 2017). It is to the former where I hoped to make a contribution through this study. I wanted to understand how effective Vega has been in cultivating graduates who intend to uphold new economy principles once they complete their studies, as well as what elements of the educational experience students deem to have been particularly influential in changing their attitudes and values and, ultimately, their intended behaviour.

In the review of the literature in the next chapter, I go into further detail about what a "new economy" means and what is required for this movement to grow and expand. There is also a review of the role of higher education in enabling students to lead and participate in a new economy.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 A new economy

*“Sooner or later (perhaps surprisingly soon) an entirely new form of economics will be needed – not the empty-world economics of Adam Smith, but what might be called ‘full-world economics’, or ‘steady-state economics’”* (Avery, 2009).

There is dual use of the term new economy. Firstly, it can be used to describe the way in which innovation is being driven through rapid advances in technology and how this is shaping the economy, business thinking and modern culture (“New Economy”, 2004; Lohr, 2001).

In this study I will be using it in its other sense, which refers to a movement that *“seeks an economy that is increasingly green and socially responsible, and one that is based on rethinking the nature of ownership and the growth paradigm that guides conventional policies”* (Alperovitz, 2011).

It needs to be noted that research and projects related to this movement do not necessarily use the term “new economy” to position and describe themselves. In some instances, it is spoken of as the “future economy” (Wallis, 2013), the “great transition” (Raskin et al., 2002), the “next system” (Alperovitz, Speth, & Guinan, 2015), the solidarity economy (SolidarityNYC, n.d.) or the wellbeing economy (Fioramonti, 2017). However, what they have in common is that they are trying to develop a framework *“that seeks to place the well-being of people and the planet at the centre of the economic development”* (Amis, n.d.).

#### **What is spurring this movement on?**

*“Millions of consumers and citizens are already convinced of a fact that many corporate chieftains are still reluctant to admit: the legacy model of economic production that has driven the ‘modern’ economy over the last hundred years is on its last legs. Like a piece of clapped out engine, it’s held together with bailing wire and duct tape, frequently breaks down and befouls the air with noxious fumes”* (Hamel, 2010).

The search for a new economic model is being necessitated by many interdependent global threats whose root causes can be traced to the current economic system (Fullerton, 2015). People from various sectors – politicians, academics, civil society – have started to raise questions about the success of the current economy and the sustainability of maintaining future growth under the same economic assumptions. The main themes of these questions are around the following:

#### **Ecology**

- We live on a planet of finite resources (oil, strategic minerals, land, fish, etc.) – how can the

world continue to produce and consume these resources at the rate at which is required to sustain the desired global economic growth (Jackson, 2011)?

- How soon will the planet no longer be able to assimilate the environmental impacts of our economic activity? Climate change is already being felt around the world and the most affected are those living in poverty (Jackson, 2011).

#### Society

- Six decades of economic growth, yet still a fifth of the world's population earn just two per cent of global income, while the richest twenty per cent earn seventy-four per cent of global income (Jackson, 2011). What are the implications of this disparity for society as a whole and how can a truly successful economy result in such a situation?
- Is it possible that the capitalistic nature of our economy is causing a social recession so that even people who do have more "stuff" aren't necessarily happier (Rutherford, 2008)?

As much as these issues are critical on a global scale, they are equally relevant here and now in South Africa (Fioramonti, 2017).

With respect to the impact of climate change, South Africa is extremely vulnerable and exposed due to its socio-economic and environmental context. The potential results of international action not effectively limiting the average global temperature increase could be increased occurrence and severity of veld and forest fires, floods and droughts, and mass extinction of endemic plant and animal species. From a social context, it is the poor who will be disproportionately affected (South African Government, 2013). In terms of resources, South Africa's current freshwater resource status is described as being under immense pressure and it is estimated that South Africa's freshwater resources will be unable to sustain the current patterns of water use and discharge (Bega, 2018).

South Africa also holds the dubious title of being one of the most unequal societies on earth with sixty to sixty-five per cent of wealth concentrated in the hands of just ten per cent of the population (Allison, 2015). According to Thomas Piketty in an interview with *Financial Mail*, "*this stems obviously from the apartheid legacy, but also from the 'neoliberal' pro-market and pro-rich policies that have dominated the world, including SA, since the 1980s-1990s*" (Bisseker & Rose, 2015).

*These mounting social, ethical, economic, financial, and environmental crises, connected in an incomprehensibly complex web, are converging into a global emergency that even the most entrenched denialists will soon be unable to ignore. It is now critical that our modern economic system evolve past today's immoral "rationalism" to address both the environmental crisis and the growing list of societal challenges, most notably chronic unemployment, the grotesquely inequitable distribution of wealth, and the oppressive poverty of nearly half of the world's population* (Fullerton, 2015).

### 2.1.1 History of the new economy movement

*“Towards what ultimate point is society tending by its industrial progress? When the progress ceases, in what condition are we to expect that it will leave humankind?”* – John Stuart Mill, 1857 as cited in Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens (1972)

Although over the centuries (particularly since the start of industrialisation) questions have been raised about the sustainability of humanity’s treatment of each other and the planet, it seems that it is in the last thirty-five years that this conversation has gained momentum with stronger critique of the institutions that permit such behaviour (Jackson, 2011). Robertson (1997) tracks the beginnings of the new economy movement to the 1970s where a number of studies and reports started to question the accepted truths of classical economics, particularly with respect to its sustainability. Among these, The Club of Rome’s first report, “The Limits to Growth” (Meadows et al., 1972), is often referred to as being one of the leading studies in challenging the status quo (Alperovitz et al., 2015; Avery, 2009; Baets & Oldenboom, n.d.; Baumol, Litan, & Schramm, 2007; Jackson, 2011). This report concluded that in a closed system like the earth, continued exponential growth of the population, food production, industrialisation, the exploitation of natural resources and pollution would result in a collapse in the second half of the twenty-first century unless a collective commitment could curb this indiscriminate growth (Colomobo, n.d.). At the time of its publication, the report received much criticism as being a “doomsday fantasy” (Turner & Alexander, 2014) and irrational for implying the need for a “zero-growth” economy (Colomobo, n.d.).

Despite the fierce resistance of politicians, managers and economists, the alarm had been raised. In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was convened by the United Nations to address growing concerns about the consequences of the accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural resources. The outcome of the work by the WCED was the report “Our Common Future”, commonly known as the Brundlandt Report (Colomobo, n.d.). This report coined and defined the term sustainable development, which is still the most influential term today (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013). Although the definition provided was criticised as being vague, what was notable is that it addressed three dimensions which it says are interconnected: the economy, the ecology and society (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013). This recognition of the systemic nature of the problems facing our world is an important concept in the new economics.

As much as this shift towards recognising sustainable development as a goal was an important one, Robertson notes that the new economics brings an even more radical perspective to sustainable development, and implies more far-reaching changes. The mainstream still see economic growth as a prerequisite to sustainable development, whereas the new economics perspective sees economic growth as a misleading policy goal *“in principle neither desirable nor undesirable, but in practice often environmentally and socially damaging”* (Robertson, 1997).

Although the idea that growth may be anything other than positive was particularly out of favour during the 1980s and 1990s (with the rightward shift to the monetarist, "free-market", business-centred economic policies of Thatcherism and Reaganism), mainstream opinion has shifted – after a time lag – to incorporate new economics approaches as independent voices have spread awareness of the need to shift to sustainable development and what this will involve (Robertson, 1997).

*“A key question is how to accelerate this process of ‘turning the margins into the mainstream’, in order to minimise human suffering and environmental damage and smooth the transition from unsustainable to sustainable development” (Robertson, 1997).*

There are a number of forward thinkers and activists who, as individuals or as part of organisations, are doing their best to lobby and motivate for a new economy *now*. Some of these initiatives span nations, whilst others are specific to a community. While these movements cannot claim to provide all the answers, they are putting forward exploratory models that emphasise fundamental changes in underlying political-economic institutions (Alperovitz et al., 2015).

On a national level, The UNEP report, Multiple Pathways to Development: Initial Findings from the Global South (2015) highlights some unique national initiatives aiming to transition to more sustainable and socially inclusive economies.

“Ecological Civilization” is a Chinese concept for a sustainable development framework that is defined as “a resource efficient and environmental-friendly society, based on the carrying capacity of the environment, observing the law of nature and aimed at realizing sustainable development” (UNEP, 2015). This concept was a response to China’s growing environmental crisis, which resulted from its traditional development path. It has brought about considerable positive outcomes but it remains an ongoing process that will take time to achieve.

In Thailand, the concept of Sufficiency Economy guides policy and is embedded in the national development plan, which aims to promote sustainable and balanced economic, social and environment development. This concept draws on Thailand’s deep Bhuddist traditions and emphasises the “middle way” – the importance of balance (Oxford Business Group, 2016). E. F Schumacher, who was among the first to argue that economic production was too wasteful of the environment and non-renewable resources, is well known for his 1966 essay titled “Bhuddist economics” which was influenced by the time he spent in Burma along with Mohandas Gandhi and G.I. Gurdjieff, and also by his friend, the Buddhist writer Edward Conze (O’Brien, 2017).

Buen vivir, rooted in the sumak kawsay worldview of the Quechua peoples of the Andes refers to a way of a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive (Balch, 2013). Although in English it can loosely be translated into “well living”, Eduardo Gudynas, a leading scholar on the subject, says that this doesn’t reflect how “the subject of wellbeing is not about the individual, but the individual in the social context of their community and in a unique environmental



situation" (Balch, 2013). "Living Well" was integrated into the Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009. For Bolivia, the paradigm of "Living Well" is a guiding aspect in the establishment of the "Communitarian Socialism for Living Well", and it has been incorporated into the country's current legal and planning system (UNEP REPORT).

With respects to specific initiatives, the New Economics Foundation, for example, is a UK think tank that aims to transform the economy so that it works for people and the planet ("New Economics Foundation," n.d.). They do this through providing research that shows what is wrong with the current economy and how it can be bettered; putting their ideas into action and working with other organisations to build a movement.

The New Economy Coalition is a US-based network of organisations that are striving for a future where people, communities and ecosystems thrive ("New Economy Coalition" n.d.). The coalition sees itself as building a long-term "community of practice" – a place where new economy activists can find one another, learn from one another and participate in different kinds of movement building. Some of their members include: B-Lab (the non-profit organisation behind benefit corporations); the Donella Meadows Institute (applies systems thinking in Vermont to explore what a model of a new economy could look like); TimeBank USA (a global movement where acts of service become a new kind of currency), Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (aims to encourage and highlight local economy leaders who are inventing alternatives to a broken economic system and thereby encourage others to do the same); the Cooperative Economics Alliance of New York City (supports community-led, democratically-controlled initiatives in NYC) and The Working World (providers of non-extractive finance – possible through the promotion of a more inclusive form of ownership) inter alia.

Here in South Africa we have ATTANE (African Transition to a New Economy), which is a platform designed to allow Africa's innovative leaders and entrepreneurs to dialogue and champion possible solutions for the continent's issues. Another initiative is WE-Africa, which is an alliance of scholars and practitioners who share a common concern about the current socio-economic conditions in which we live and are working together to promote a transition to a wellbeing-based economy for Africa through the development of a new economy (WE-Africa, 2014).

So although there is no centralised organising body behind the new economy movement, there definitely is a collective of initiatives worldwide that are searching for alternative ways that humankind can be on this earth. Consequently a universally valid and accepted definition of a new economy is difficult to provide at this stage due to the fact that the field is still evolving and its boundaries are porous, but "considerable clarity on its essence and basic characteristic" does exist (Anup,2014).

### 2.1.2 What do supporters of the new economy movement hope to achieve?

*“To advance an Everyone a Changemaker world, where anyone can apply the skills of changemaking to solve complex social problems” (Drayton as cited in Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller (2008))*

In *The New Economics of Sustainable Development*, Roberston (1997) describes how, in seeking sustainable development, this new economy moves:

- *“away from a state-centred or business-centred economic system, towards a more people-centred system, and*
- *away from money-measured growth as the principal economic target and measure of success, towards sustainability in terms of real-life social and environmental and economic variables.”*

The outcomes of this new economy according to ATTANE are:

- *“Human well-being: through decent jobs, providing safer and better neighborhoods, supporting social capital;*
- *equality and social justice: addressing inequality by creating opportunities for all; and*
- *sustainability.” (‘ATTANE’ n.d.)*

Tim Jackson (2011) describes a state of prosperity that humanity should be striving for through rethinking the economy:

*“Prosperity speaks of the elimination of hunger and homelessness, an end to poverty and injustice, hopes for a secure and peaceful world. And this vision is important not just for altruistic reasons but often too as reassurance that our own lives are meaningful... A better society for our children. A fairer world. A place where those less fortunate will one day thrive.”*

He challenges the conventional formula that achieving prosperity relies on the pursuit of economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and seeks instead to define a vision where it is possible for humans beings to flourish, achieve greater social cohesion, find higher levels of well-being and yet still reduce their material impact on the environment. This means refuting the belief that prosperity is equal to opulence (the more we have the better off we are) or utility (the satisfaction we get from material goods defines us) and replacing it with the idea that prosperity is about having the capabilities to flourish (Jackson, 2011). Note that this does not mean living with a set of disembodied freedoms, but within a range of “bounded capabilities”. A fair and lasting prosperity cannot be isolated from these material conditions (Jackson, 2011).

Jackson takes the capabilities required to flourish from Nussbaum (2003):

- *life (being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length);*
- *bodily health (being able to have good health);*
- *bodily integrity (being able to move from place to place, to be secure against violent assault);*
- *senses, imagination and thought (being able to use the senses, and to imagine, think and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way);*
- *emotions (being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves);*
- *practical reason (being able to form a conception of the good life);*
- *affiliation (being able to live with and toward others);*
- *other species (being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature);*
- *play (being able to laugh, play and enjoy recreational activities); and*
- *control over one’s environment (political and material).*

Herein lies the challenge for “new economists” – how to create a society in which these basic entitlements are possible within a finite planet.

### 2.1.3 Where change needs to happen

*“Perhaps former finance minister Trevor Manuel, in a post-speech interview with the Daily Maverick, put his finger on the problem: that while we all know Piketty is right, no one – not the government, not big business, not the economic elites – is in a hurry to implement his ideas. ‘We’ve got the framework in place, but I think the problems are not in the economics, it’s not even in the tax law. **Our problems are in the leadership and how we convene society to understand that we’re in this together,**’ said Manuel” (Allison, 2015).*

According to Jackson (2011), two approaches are required to achieve a lasting prosperity of the type described earlier. The first is to create a new economic framework which places economic activity within ecological limits – *“an economic engine that doesn’t rely for its stability on relentless consumption growth and expanding material throughput”* (Jackson, 2011). The second lies in *“shifting the social logic of consumerism”*. This speaks to changes in values, lifestyles and social structure to achieve a balance between the values of novelty and tradition, and between self and society. As Jackson says, we create the social world, therefore we can recreate it. *“Its norms are our norms. Its visions are our visions. Its structures and institutions shape and are shaped by those norms and visions. This is where transformation is needed”* (Jackson, 2011).

It is not only Jackson who emphasises the importance of starting with societal values and beliefs. As mentioned in the introduction, a recurrent common thread which emerges across articles discussing potential new economic models is the need for a new worldview, which is defined as the set of fundamental beliefs and values an individual possesses about how the world is (Piasentin & Roberts, 2017). These beliefs and values set the limits on what a person can “know” and “see”.

*“I have come to believe that it is only with a **new, shared belief system**, a shared story, that we can tackle the immense political, social, and economic challenges we face as we race against time to find our way to the Regenerative Economy” (Fullerton, 2015).*

*“Nevertheless, work on corporate social responsibility, sustainability and even triple-bottom-line reporting, while often positive in themselves, will not lead to the necessary systemic change. What we now require is a **shift in our fundamental thinking**” (Wallis, 2013).*

*“In a world where business lurches from crisis to crisis and scandal to scandal, where ordinary people see their savings wiped out through the unscrupulous and largely risk-insulated decisions of executives and managers, and where governments are compelled to intervene and prevent further collapse and loss, there is a desperate need for a **new way of thinking**” (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013).*

*“We need a fundamental, transformative **shift in thinking**, values, and action by all of society’s leaders and professionals, as well as the general population” (Cortese, 2003).*

What are the beliefs being challenged by a new economy? Across the literature, several common themes emerge:

Table 1: Old economy vs new economy beliefs

Area	Old economy	New economy
Economy	<p>We <b>can</b> continue to grow the economy – technological advancements will likely allow us to do so by reducing our impact on the environment (Baets &amp; Oldenboom, 2013; Cortese, 2003; Fullerton, 2015; Jackson, 2011b; Wallis, 2013).</p>	<p><i>“The economy is a subsystem of a larger and finite system, the biosphere; hence <b>permanent growth is impossible.</b>”</i> (Max-Neef, 2009)</p> <p><i>“The more technology progresses, the greater the need for humans to make decisions and to use technology to best realise their potential”</i> (Baets &amp; Oldenboom, 2013).</p> <p>Technological advancements can only take us so far. Also technological advancements within the old economy paradigm will only perpetuate the existing system.</p>
	<p>We <b>should</b> continue to grow the economy if we want to achieve a global minimum level of development (Baets &amp; Oldenboom, 2013; Fullerton, 2015; Jackson, 2011b; Wallis, 2013).</p>	<p><i>“Growth is not the same as development; development does not necessarily require growth”</i> – (Max-Neef, 2009)</p> <p>The growth of the global economy thus far has not proven to be the “rising tide that raises all ships”.</p>
	<p>The economic system is a natural phenomenon, not a human-made construction (Armour 2010; Miller 2011)</p>	<p>The inverse – the economic system is a made construction and therefore <i>“the economy is to serve the people; the people are not to serve the economy”</i> – (Max-Neef, 2009)</p>
	<p>Economic logic and economic values guide decisions toward socially desirable outcomes and therefore should be the dominant institution in society (Robertson, 1997).</p>	<p>Similar to the above points – the levels of global inequality, poverty and environmental destruction are the result of the dominant economic logic and are in no way socially desirable outcomes.</p>

Business	Business is about advantage, focus, differentiation, superiority and excellence – love and compassion have no place in for-profit business (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013; Hamel, 2010)	<p><i>“What are you doing in your professional life, and are you willingly talking about the details of what you do and how you do it to your children and grandchildren?”</i> (Baets &amp; Oldenboom, 2013)</p> <p>How would the world be better if corporations did not exclude compassion from their decision-making?</p>
Humanity	Individual success is independent of the health and well-being of communities, cultures and the life support system (Cortese, 2003).	Everyone is worse off in a society which exhibits high levels of inequality – my well-being is dependent on the well-being of society as a whole (Jackson, 2011).
	Money buys happiness (Fullerton, 2015; Jackson, 2011; Simms et al., 2009).	Acquiring/consuming more and more material goods does not necessarily lead to greater happiness (Jackson, 2011). My prosperity is not fully dependent on my wealth.

*Table 2: Old economy vs new economy values*

Old economy	New economy
Human-made dominance	Respect for the natural world
Hierarchy	Social justice and prosperity for all
Individuality	Holism
Bigger is better	Simplicity/small is beautiful
Speed	Time
Winner takes all/ownership	Collaboration/sharing/community

Kate Raworth (2017), in her book *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Economist*, describes how many of these old economy beliefs are based upon an economic mindset that has been taught since the 1950s. This would not be a problem if not for the many flawed assumptions on which much of this economic theory is based and the extent to which these assumptions have pervaded all aspects of society. Raworth cites F.S. Michaels from her book

*Monoculture: How one story is changing everything* who writes: “In these early decades of the twenty-first century, the master story is economic: economic beliefs, values and assumptions are shaping how we think, feel and act”.

These beliefs in progress, material abundance and the goodness of growth; faith in the efficacy of science and technology; and a view of nature as something to be subdued are so entrenched that they have been referred to in the literature as forming our DSP (Dunlap, 2008). Dunlap (2008) uses Pirages and Ehrlich's (1974) definition of DSP, which is “*the prominent worldview, model, or frame of reference through which individuals or collectively, a society, interpret the meaning of the external world*”. If we do not address change at a paradigm level it would be “*equivalent to treating the symptom rather than the underlying cause*” (Piasentin & Roberts, 2017).

David Korten (2008) sums up this story that we have bought into and challenges us to find a new story to replace it:

*“Time is money. Money is wealth. Making money creates wealth and is the defining purpose of the individual, business, and the economy. Those who make money are society’s wealth creators. Their affluent lifestyles are their fair and just reward for their special contribution; they merit our appreciation and respect. Material consumption is the path to happiness. We humans are by nature individualistic and competitive. The invisible hand of the free market directs our insatiable competitive drive to serve ends that maximize the wealth of all. Inequality and environmental damage are regrettable, but necessary, collateral damage on the path to prosperity for all. If we hold true to course, economic growth will eventually create sufficient wealth to end poverty and drive the technological advances needed to end human dependence on nature.”*

#### **2.1.4 Criticism of the new economy movement**

It seems that the main point of contention between supporters of a new economy and its critics is that of the need for economic growth. Raworth (2017) says that for over sixty years economic thinking has told us that GDP is a good enough proxy for economic progress and it should look like an ever-rising line, but now the movement that best describes the progress we need is “*coming into balance*”. This concept is foundational to the new economy movement and has resulted in spin-off movements, such as that of steady-state economies and even degrowth, which is “*a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet*” (Research & Degrowth, n.d.).

Critics, however, say that this tendency to think of economic growth in terms of material considerations *versus* moral ones is incomplete. Friedman (2013) argues that the value of economic growth – meaning a rising standard of living for the majority of citizens – lies not just in the concrete improvements it brings to how individuals live, but in how it shapes the social, political and, ultimately, the moral character of a people. He refers to numerous examples where times of economic prosperity

have fostered greater opportunity, tolerance of diversity, social mobility, commitment to fairness and dedication to democracy within a society. On the other hand, times of economic stagnation and decline have led to society retreating into rigidity and intolerance. He acknowledges that economic growth has had some negative impacts, but simply says that arguments that economic growth is “morally wrong” do not take into account the consequences of economic growth that are morally beneficial.

Some critics, such as the Freemarket Foundation in South Africa, are stronger in their beliefs that better human well-being is the outcome of higher economic growth. This organisation and others like it believe in maximum individual economic freedom defined in terms of the fundamental principles of protection of private property, voluntary exchange and freedom to compete (Nolutshungu, 2017). New economy supporters would say that it is exactly such freedoms that have led to high levels of inequality and environmental degradation.

Another argument against those who seek to overhaul the way we currently understand economic prosperity, is that they have neglected to take into account the technological innovations that will eventually allow us to decouple the economy from the environment. Decoupling would allow the economy to grow without using more resources and exacerbating environmental problems (Ward et al. 2017). New economy supporters, however, say that the only way this would be possible is through absolute decoupling and the examples often used to refer to successful decoupling are actually only partial and more a result of substitution, financialisation and cost shifting.

Other points of contention around the issue of inequality is the idea that inequality is inevitable – some people will always be living in poverty. New economists do not believe in the ideology of social Darwinism and say that inequality and poverty are human-made and have been designed into the economic system (Hunter Lovins, panel session, Wellbeing Economy Festival, 27 November 2017).

I cannot speak for the entire new economy movement, but I imagine that supporters would say that those who are putting up the biggest fight against rethinking growth and prosperity are those who have not been able to shift their mindset and challenge the beliefs that have been so foundational to the way our society has been ruled for so long. At a recent Wellbeing Economy Festival, it was said that it is not a question of growth per se that a new economy is questioning, but rather the idea of what are we growing. Are we growing the things that matter?



## 2.2 Why higher education?

*“Higher education institutions bear a profound, moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to create a just and sustainable future. Higher education plays a critical but often overlooked role in making this vision a reality. It prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach, work in, and influence society’s institutions” (Cortese, 2003).*

*The global crisis is also a crisis of education. This continues to be restructured in most parts of the world to better reproduce workers, consumers and citizens who meet the needs of neoliberal capitalism. Educational institutions have largely given up “training people capable of thinking about important political, environmental, economic and social issues of global order” and reflecting and acting on radical alternatives (Huckle & Wals, 2017).*

Chapter 36 of the United Nations’ Agenda 21 (1992) identifies all education, including formal education, public awareness and training, as being critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making. Goal four of the sustainable development goals sets the following as one of its targets:

*“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (Buckler & Creech, 2014).*

The values, attitudes and skills needed for a new economy are challenging the existing DSP described earlier. As the higher education experience in particular has been recognised as establishing a template for future orientation, career directionality and social awareness (Garrin, 2013), it may have a particularly important role to play in cultivating students who are able to adopt a new economy paradigm. Garrin (2013) describes how, through the process of self-exploration and social learning, students can begin to identify resonant social issues and determine how they can transform thought processes to alter social systems for the benefit of the greater good. *“The college experience reflects a hotbed for dynamic, multidimensional growth; a period of significant learning and enlightenment; and an opportunity to develop the competencies, expectancies, and evaluations that underpin the capacity for students to become socially agentic” (Garrin, 2013).*

Therefore, there is no doubt that HEIs, through their primary functions of education, research and outreach, can contribute to making a more sustainable world (Fadeeva & Mochizuki, 2010). Sustainability-literate students are equipped with sustainability-relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and are able to challenge the DSP that maintains our unsustainable practices, facilitating

change towards sustainable development (Piasentin & Roberts, 2017). This idea that HEIs are held responsible for developing graduates as future agents for the betterment of society is becoming a more mainstream idea (Sin & McGuigan 2013). Trencher et al. (2014) believe that this could be the “fourth mission” of higher education: that of a societal transformer and co-creator defined as a role where the university collaborates with diverse social actors to create societal transformations with the goal of materialising sustainable development in a specific location, region or societal sub-sector. Considering that as many as 20 000 global HEIs work with an estimated 150 million students every year and more than eighty per cent of the decision-makers in industry, community and politics are graduates of universities (Buckler & Creech, 2014) the reach and potential for influence of the higher education sector in moving the world to sustainable development is significant.

How have universities wielded their responsibility thus far? David Orr commences his book, *Earth in Mind*, by sharing frightening figures of the planetary resources being lost in just one day. He then goes on to note that this destruction isn’t the work of ignorant people, but rather people who can boast of having BAs, BSs LLBs, MBAs and PHDs (Orr, 1994).

Universities and colleges that offer business degrees are particularly criticized by new economy proponents as churning out business graduates who go on to work for or create companies that seek profits at the cost of the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants (Korten, 2010). It has been found that business students tend to be less concerned about environmental problems when compared to other students (Cordano et al., 2003), and, until recently, attention to non-human nature has been absent from the strategic management literature from stakeholder theory and limited in the field of business ethics (Gladwin et al., 1995). The reason given for this is that the foundation of the typical business degree is based on a mainstream economic paradigm of shareholder-value only, success and money (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013; Steiner & Watson, 2006; Petocz & Dixon, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Ng & Burke, 2010). Orr (1991) says that we have bought into the myth that the purpose of education is to give students the means for upward mobility and success as our culture has defined it. MacVaugh and Norton (2012) similarly discuss how business management students enter university expecting their lecturers to induct them into the professional skills and knowledge that lead to career success, and they do not expect nor desire to focus their study time on environmental problems, global responsibility and intergenerational concerns. Cortese (2003) says that while environmental specialists are necessary they are not sufficient – understanding how to create a just and sustainable society must be a fundamental principle in all education – including business management education. *“The past scripts of management education are insufficient to prepare students to meet the dramatic changes and challenges we currently face in technology, globalization, and sustainability”* (Beatty, 2010). It is noted in the literature that business schools have a distinctive opportunity to contribute to the development of individuals who will be able to generate the organisations, services, technologies, and products to address the world’s most important social problems – many of which can be solved through relatively simple innovation and the creative use of existing resources as opposed to complex technical or scientific solutions (Lawrence, Phillips, & Tracey, 2012).

In this same vein, knowledge imparted by HEIs has been deemed useful if it enabled the young generation receiving the education to find remunerated employment.

*“Today, education is a contested notion that is responsible for socialising people into unquestioningly accepting the prevailing patterns of development and to serve the needs of a few. Hailed as an essential promoter of human welfare, its enduring discourse is rather focused on promoting employability: churning out workers or their glamorised version, professionals, to sustain society’s inherent consumerism”*(Gokool-ramdoo & Rumjaun, 2016).

It has been assumed that finding a job means that a useful function in society is being fulfilled ( Laszlo, 2005). Laszlo, however, says that there is an additional element of useful knowledge that goes beyond the immediate concern regarding finding remuneration and, hence, assumedly socially useful employment. He defines this type of knowledge as “timely wisdom”, which will allow the next generation to ensure the ongoing viability of society beyond the immediate requirements of the domestic and international marketplace. Other pre-eminent educators are in agreement that the university’s role extends beyond preparing students for careers and should also equip and encourage them to be responsible citizens who are actively tackling social issues (Steiner & Watson, 2006).

*“The plain fact is that the planet does not need more ‘successful’ people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane”* (Orr, 1991).

### **2.2.1 What could “timely wisdom” be in higher education?**

Before looking at how HEIs can create a learning environment to develop graduates with the beliefs and values that will support a new economy, what are the competencies required to create a prosperous future society with capabilities as defined by Jackson (2011)? According to Hurtado & DeAngelo (2012) the conversation in higher education has shifted from a focus on what students know to whether they know how to think and, more importantly, toward the goal of providing skills needed for living and working in the twenty-first century.

Various academics and practitioners have recommended certain new mindsets required by participants and leaders in this new economy world. Although the actual words used may not be the same, there are definitely common themes that can be identified across the work in this space:

**Consciousness:** *“Our minds hold both the cause of the current unsustainable economic models and the key for transforming them”* (Tideman et al., 2013). In their review of sustainable business practices and the comparison of leadership theories for a sustainable future, Tideman et al. (2013)

find that tomorrow's leaders must fundamentally change the way they think, i.e. their mindset or consciousness. They say that this emphasis on consciousness corresponds with the increasing recognition in economic science of the shortcoming of classical economical thinking of supply/demand, market equilibrium and rationality, which ignores the psychological and social. Baets & Oldenboom (2013) also go into detail on the importance of enhancing one's levels of consciousness.

**Systemic thinking:** The ability to see and understand connections in society, the natural world and the human-made world is recognised by many as being important in order for future leaders to take on the challenges the world is facing (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013; Roberts, 2012; Senge et al., 2008; Tideman et al., 2013). Stephens et al. (2008) use the analogy of an engineer who has traditionally been taught how to build a bridge, and society now need this engineer to also be able to incorporate into the building of the bridge considerations about what is on both sides of the bridge, who might be using the bridge, when and why, and how the needs for the bridge may change over time.

**Compassion:** Also described as empathy (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013) and humanistic thinking (Roberts, 2012), this refers to the ability to sense another's emotions and be motivated to ameliorate a situation when necessary.

**Proactive optimism:** This is about having a vision of a better future and having the belief in human's and one's own competence to make it a reality (Roberts, 2012; Senge et al., 2008).

### **The new economy leader**

Below is a table summarising the beliefs, skills and values required of graduates who will lead a new economy. New paradigm typologies are still being developed and explored, and there is still no consensus in the literature about how to describe and label the different paradigms that exist or about the most appropriate paradigms to promote sustainability (Piasentin & Roberts, 2017). These paradigms generally fall along a continuum from ecocentric to the neoclassical economic paradigm, and individual and organisation behaviours and practices may reflect aspects of more than one worldview (Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008).

*Table 3: The new economy leader*

<b>Beliefs</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Values</b>
<p>Economic science isn't fact. The below principles can be challenged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a laissez fair market with minimal government intervention is the best solution</li> <li>- increasing economic output – growth in the GDP – leads to improved well-being: a higher standard of living and a better quality of life across society</li> <li>- exclusive, individual private property is the legitimate, and efficient, way to organise access to resources and the means of livelihood</li> <li>- inequality is a law of economic development</li> </ul> <p>Everything is connected – humanity is embedded in the living world, not dominant over it - humanity must live in harmony with nature</p> <p>Diversity is something to be celebrated</p> <p>Material abundance does not equate to happiness</p> <p>The purpose of business isn't profit maximisation – it can be a powerful tool to make the world a better place for all</p>	<p>Systemic thinking</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Conflict resolution and negotiation</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Imagining alternatives</p> <p>Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research skills</p> <p>Personal introspection, visioning and buy-in to identifying change</p> <p>Social action</p> <p>Real world problem-solving</p> <p>Future-mindedness</p> <p>Innovative</p> <p>Adaptive</p> <p>Assertiveness and persuasiveness</p>	<p>Authenticity and ethical self-awareness</p> <p>Ubuntu<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Lagom<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Resilience</p> <p>Optimism</p> <p>Passion</p> <p>Emotional intelligence</p> <p>Curiosity</p> <p>Interdependence</p> <p>Self-transcendence</p> <p>Unconditional responsibility</p> <p>Charity, social and economic justice</p> <p>Citizenship and stewardship</p> <p>Empowerment and motivation</p>

<sup>1</sup> *Ubuntu: "a multidimensional concept which represents the core values of African ontologies: respect for any human being, for human dignity and for human life, collective sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, communalism"*(Kamwangamalu, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> *Lagom: A Swedish word that represents the concept of just the right amount, equitably shared* (Constanza, 2015)

<p>We can choose how we use technology – bigger and faster isn't necessarily better</p> <p>Humans are, by nature, reciprocal and cooperative – self-interest is not the principal motivation underlying human behaviour. A shift in viewing people as Homo economicus to Homo Aperti, etc.</p> <p>Freedom means growing and developing as unique, purposeful and conscious human beings in a rich network of caring relationships with other human beings</p>		
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With reference to: Raworth, 2017; Ofei-Manu & Didham, 2014; Baets & Oldenboom, 2013; Tideman et al., 2013; Wallis 2013; Cortese, 2003; Robertson, 1997; Simms et al., 2009; Fullerton, 2015; Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008; Hamel, 2010; Senge et al., 2008; Sipos et al., 2008; Petrick, 2017; Fioramonti, 2017

### 2.2.2 What should HEIs be doing?

*“As engines of change, colleges and universities can effectively develop human capital to implement pattern-changing ideas to address the world’s most pressing challenges. The development of student competencies will depend on the creation of effective pedagogies and methodologies to ensure results” (Janiunaite & Gelbudiene, 2014).*

In this section I referenced the EFS literature (which new economy advocates are turning to as it shares similar values and goals (Alperovitz, 2016)) with a particular focus on affective learning for reasons which are elaborated below. A lot of the EFS research seems to draw on critical pedagogy and transformative learning, as one of the primary goals of EFS is to get students to examine their taken-for-granted ways of thinking so they develop new beliefs and behaviours that are more inclusive and less discriminating (Sherman & Burns, 2015; Piasentin & Roberts, 2017; Gokool-ramdoo & Rumjaun, 2016). Another area of literature which was useful was the theory of transformational learning developed by Mezirow (1987). It is a key element in learning sustainability because it engages students in a participatory process of reconstructing meaning, and helps students question and reframe unconscious attitudes and values (Burns, 2016). Transformative learning theory was originally developed to specifically address the learning involved in broad social change (Hoggan, 2016).

### 2.2.3 Affective learning

*“To successfully impart competencies, those methods that involve an affective component are increasingly necessary, breaking through established patterns of action and leading to a re-evaluation of action possibilities” (Barth et al, 2007).*

According to Shepard (2008), HEIs have tended to focus on the cognitive domain of learning; what we know and understand, and how we describe, comprehend, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate this knowledge and understanding. However, Shepard also refers to Bloom et al. (1956) who identified levels of learning in the affective domain. The affective domain is about our values, attitudes and behaviours and it involves the student emotionally. It changes an individual's operational framework and guides decision-making and behavioural choices in all aspects of life (Thweatt & Wrench, 2015). Without taking the affective domain into consideration, it is possible to separate what students **learn about** during their experience of higher education from what they **learn to value** during this same period (Shephard, 2008).

David Orr (1994) looks back on history and quotes Elie Wiesel, who was commenting on the barbaric acts committed by the Germans during World War II and implied that it was the result of focussing on cognitive, over-affective education:

*“It emphasised theories instead of values, concepts rather than human beings, abstraction rather than consciousness, answers instead of questions, ideology and efficiency rather than conscience.”*

Bringing it nearer to this context, a study by Mintz and Tal (2014) found that a course dealing with environmental content does not automatically lead to the development of attitudes, motivations or skills that are needed to promote sustainability. Knowledge on environmental issues is important, but not enough to develop pro-environmental behaviour, which is the ultimate objective of sustainability education. Other objectives are “ingredients needed to achieve this goal: awareness, knowledge, concern for the environment, and skills” (Chawla & Cushing, 2007). Orr (1994) says that more of the same kind of education – education that neglects to acknowledge the affective component of learning – will only compound our problems. Yet, affective skills have received very little attention in the business education literature (Steiner & Watson, 2006).

*“Education and learning in contemporary societies are particularly weak in the development of people's emotional, moral and creative abilities, and their capacities to see relationships, connections and interdependencies” (Wals, 2017).*

In the EFS literature, an emphasis is placed on the need for a whole-institution approach to be followed by educational institutes, including HEIs (Buckler & Creech, 2014). *“Because students learn from everything around them, these activities form a complex web of experience and learning. All*

*parts of the university system are critical to achieving a transformative change that can only occur by connecting head, heart, and hand*" (Cortese, 2003). This metaphor of heart and head is also used by Steiner and Watson (2006) when they describe how business faculty must be sure to teach norms and values, as well as cognitive skills, in order to develop "tomorrow's managers from today's students".

Clugston and Calder (2000) give a breakdown of what such a whole-institute approach may require:

- The written statements of the mission and purpose of the institution and its various units express their philosophies and commitments.
- The college or university appropriately incorporates the concepts of sustainability into all academic disciplines and in liberal arts and professional education requirements, as well as into faculty and student research.
- A major shift from the current academic paradigm lies in a conscious reflection of the role of the institution in its social and ecological systems.
- Since research and teaching are the fundamental purposes of academic institutions, knowledge of sustainability is a critical concern in the hiring, tenure and promotion systems.
- The institution has an "ecological footprint". In its production and consumption, the institution follows sustainable policies and practices.
- Institutional support and campus student life services that emphasise certain practices.
- The institution is engaged in outreach and forming partnerships both locally and globally to enhance sustainability.

With respect to pedagogy in particular, Laszlo says that these competencies cannot be taught but need to be learned through reaching one's own considered conclusions, exercising sound judgment and using creativity to translate one's insights into action (Laszlo, 2005). There are many who share this view and, as a result, the literature motivates the need for participatory learning instead of rote memorisation, as the latter will not develop the necessary value "interiorisation" (Barth et al., 2007; Buckler & Creech, 2014).

*"Traditional methods of 'one-way' lecturing are of little use with a subject of such complexity. Learning and teaching in the context of sustainability should be based on a more holistic experience: discovery learning rather than reproductive learning; investigative learning rather than linear transport of material; exploring reality rather than reading books; active learning rather than passive reception of information; productive action rather than reproduction of facts; gaining experience rather than acquiring knowledge"* (Cotton, Bailey, Warren, & Bissell, 2009).

MacVaugh and Norton (2012) warn, however, that making the learning outcomes a personal responsibility also means that lecturers must accept that students may come to understand sustainability in a "global" sense, or instead choose only its "business as usual" applications.



According to Petocz and Dixon (2011), other pedagogical approaches that have been shown to be valuable in enhancing students' affective learning include discussion and debate, group work, problem-based learning, analysis of case studies, peer evaluation and self-reflection.

The literature on education for sustainability also emphasises the need for revision of existing curricula in terms of their objectives and content to develop transdisciplinary understandings of social, economic and environmental sustainability, as well as ensuring that lifelong learning skills are fostered, which include skills for creative and critical thinking, oral and written communication, collaboration and cooperation, conflict management, decision-making, problem-solving and planning, and practical citizenship (Sipos et al., 2008).

*Table 4: Summary of education for sustainability/new economy methods*

<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdisciplinary</li> <li>• Systems thinking</li> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Integrative thinking</li> <li>• Complexity</li> <li>• Cultural and biological diversity</li> <li>• Biomimicry</li> <li>• Teach responsibility – knowledge that is used well in the world</li> </ul>	(Cortese, 2003; Jucker et al., 2005; Orr 1994; Adomßent et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2008; Korten, 2010; Wals & Jickling, 2002; Burns, n.d.; Junyent & Geli d Ciurana, 2017; Clugston & Calder, 2000; Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan & Dolle, 2011)
<b>Pedagogical approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-centred as opposed to teacher-centred</li> <li>• Student freedom – strengthening self-reliance and self-direction in the learning process</li> <li>• Experiential action learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Real-world problems</li> <li>- Out-of-class experiences</li> <li>- Work-based learning</li> <li>- Problem-based learning</li> <li>- Community-service learning</li> <li>- Consistent relationship between theory and practice</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Co-operative learning relationships/social learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participative and collaborative projects</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	(Barth et al., 2007; Junyent & Geli d Ciurana, 2017; MacVaugh & Norton, 2012; Rhoads, 2009; Shephard, 2008; Wals & Jickling, 2002; Ofei-Manu & Didham, 2014; Wals, 2017)

<b>Pedagogical tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transdisciplinary case studies</li> <li>• Open debate</li> <li>• Role playing</li> <li>• Engaging with role models</li> <li>• Appropriate use of multimedia</li> <li>• Expert engagement</li> <li>• Perspective sharing via reflecting</li> <li>• Group examining of case studies</li> </ul>	(Stephens et al., 2008; Shephard, 2008)
<b>Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal and formal settings are important</li> <li>• Lecturers as role models</li> <li>• Diversity of perspectives</li> <li>• Lateral and horizontal rigour, i.e. sustainability should not be covered in a stand-alone teaching unit to avoid educational disconnect</li> <li>• HEI practices what it preaches – commitment towards sustainability</li> <li>• HEI partnerships with local and regional communities</li> <li>• Life-long learning</li> </ul>	(Barth et al., 2007; Jucker et al., 2005; Cortese, 2003; Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008; Chawla & Cushing, 2007)

#### 2.2.4 What are the challenges to making this happen?

*“Higher education has unique academic freedom and the critical mass and diversity of skills to develop new ideas, to comment on society and its challenges, and to engage in bold experimentation in sustainable living. Why then is it so averse to risk and difficult to change? Because the change sought is a deep cultural shift – the most difficult to achieve – but one of the most important leverage points for institutional transformation” (Cortese, 2003).*

There are a few obstacles in place that prevent or restrain HEIs from being able to make this shift from focussing on the more cognitive aspects of learning to engaging with affective learning, as well as other aspects of the educational experience, that foster the type of beliefs, values and competencies required in a new economy.

**\*The institutional foundation/structure of HEIs:** According to Clugston and Calder (2000), the modern university is the embodiment of the mechanistic, utilitarian worldview that shaped the scientific and industrial revolutions and is also deeply involved in providing expertise for an "unsustainable" world economy (Clugston & Calder, 2000; Orr, 1991). As a result, much higher education curricula tends not to ask students to challenge the common assumptions and beliefs

upheld by the institutions supporting the existing economy (Cortese, 2003).

**\*Seeking affective outcomes is not a responsibility of the university:** There is a view that as a key aim of a transformative higher education experience is to enable students to engage in autonomous thinking and self-determination, trying to instill certain values in students for a “new economy” is bordering on indoctrination or brainwashing (Wals & Jickling, 2002). *“Greening the curriculum should be a voluntary activity and it is irrational to expect higher education to respond to government steering on this, or on any other value-laden societal issue.”* Larson and Redman (2011), however, point out that the traditional practice of detaching the course content from values and morals does not translate into the absence of values – all curricula are value laden.

**\*Seeking affective outcomes is not within the capability of the university:** Shephard (2010) quotes Fish (2008) who believes that higher education can legitimately do two things: 1) introduce students to new bodies of knowledge and traditions of enquiry and 2) equip them with the skills to move confidently within those traditions and engage in their own further research. HEIs are not equipped to enhance the moral, civic or social characters of students with respect to social, political and cultural issues. Measuring affective or transformative outcomes is also said to be too difficult to make it part of a course’s goals, and as most business faculty would be familiar with Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy, they are more likely use that when developing course learning objectives and assessments (Steiner & Watson, 2006). As a counter argument to this, Shephard (2008) notes that many disciplines taught within higher education do in fact seek professional values within their graduates, such as within medicine.

**\*Not of interest/relevance to all students:** As discussed earlier, students who have selected a business degree may have done so to get the skills they believe will make them a success in the business world of today and do not believe learning about ecological economics, for instance, is relevant to them. While this view is changing, the approach to address these issues has been to develop bolt-on environmental courses like a module on corporate social responsibility (CSR) or business ethics, rather than a radically redesigned course. Shephard (2010), however, argues that personal issues, such as financial security, may primarily dominate students’ individual views. Therefore, it may not be rational to expect such people to individually push the university in any particular direction and entirely rational to expect them to conclude that university leaders are there to make these difficult close-call decisions, i.e. it is up to HEIs to prepare business students by teaching them how to be successful in the future.

**\*Values of academic staff:** According to the discussion in Shephard (2010), academic staff in universities may have essentially the same values as those of wider society and are in no position to lead students towards sustainable living. However implicit in this argument is the assumption that educators continue to rely on teacher-centred approaches as opposed to active student-centred learning which has been described as being fundamental for education for sustainability.

**\*Lack of interdisciplinary collaboration:** The wicked problems that need to be tackled by future participants of a new economy are systemic and cannot be solved by taking a siloed, single-disciplinary approach. However, HEIs are generally organised around disciplines with little transdisciplinary collaboration and skill transfer taking place across disciplines (Barth et al., 2007; Cotton et al., 2009). *“Compartmentalized knowledge without connection to larger system interactions results in viewing many interdependent challenges as separate, hierarchical, and competitive. The net results are often unintended narrow, ineffective solutions, or worse, more harmful to people and the environment in another place or another time”* (Cortese, 2003).

However, despite these challenges, there is a growing support in HEIs around the world for the place of values in supporting a sustainable society. Since the Stockholm Conference in 1972, where education was formally recognised on an international level as playing an important role in fostering environmental protection and conservation, many declarations, charters and partnerships have been designed to provide guidelines or frameworks for HEIs to better embed sustainability into their system. For a more detailed overview of these, see Lozano et al. (2013). The UN also declared 2005 - 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), which sought to mobilise the educational resources of the world to help create a more sustainable future (“UN Decade of ESD”, n.d.). According to a paper published by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, South Africa does display a growing interest in how universities are responding to sustainability issues, however, most current learning pathways to ESD careers are postgraduate, thus more opportunities should be created for entry-level pathways in higher education (Ramsarup, 2013).

With respect to business management education in particular, Principles of Responsible Management Education (“What is PRME”, n.d.) is a UN-supported initiative that serves *“as a platform to raise the profile of sustainability in schools around the world, and to equip today's business students with the understanding and ability to deliver change tomorrow”*. It works through six principles that universities and business schools voluntarily commit to uphold (see Appendix A for list of principles). Since its inception participants have grown to 650 leading business schools and management-related academic institutions from over eighty countries across the world (“Signatories,” n.d) Ten of these represent South African institutes of which Vega is not one. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business also calls on business schools to buy into a vision where they become enablers of global prosperity (Who we are, n.d.). It appears again, though, that a large constituent of HEIs supporting these principles are business schools and postgraduate level institutes.

To summarise some of the key points of the literature review, it is evident that on the one hand we have a dire situation that needs to change and that change will likely only come about through a shift in the way we think. On the other hand, we have HEIs with the potential to foster the adoption of a new mindset within their students. My intention with this study is to understand how successful a new-economy-thinking-aligned HEI has been in doing so. I would then like to understand what aspects of the educational experience were supportive of establishing a new economy mindset and what aspects

were insufficient.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study was based on a single case study methodology using Vega School as the case. According to Yin (2003), case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. This is applicable to this research as I'm trying to understand *how* a "new economy" mindset of a business student is shaped by their educational experience. The process of how this happens is indeed a complex one and there are multiple variables that may be at play – this is another motivation for using a case study approach (Rosenberg & Yates, 2007).

Single case studies, which represent unique features or attributes, can be used to provide convincing data to test theories (Gaya & Smith, 2016), as exploratory devices before conducting further studies (Yin, 2003) or to allow one to gain certain insights that other organisations would not be able to provide (Siggelkow, 2007; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In this instance, I argue that Vega does indeed present a unique case – it is an HEI offering business-related degrees, which professes to inculcate students with a set of values that go against the typical business maxim of profit maximisation (Baets & Oldenboom, 2013). Through its healthy brand model, Vega instead encourages students to create brands that deliver original, meaningful value to society where profit is the consequence rather than the driver and motivator of brand (and people) behaviour.

There are other advantages of using Vega as a single case study that support its use as a revelatory case, as it is a stand-alone business school, rather than a business school embedded in the system of a larger public university, so this may cut down on some of the additional noise.

### **3.2 Research approach**

When I first began to consider the "problem" of how to fix higher education, I immediately turned to literature around behaviour change such as Ajzen's "Theory of Planned Behaviour" (1991). This model has proved very popular due to its efficacy in accounting for variance in intention and behaviour, its relative parsimony, and its flexibility across a wide variety of social behaviours (Hagger & Chatzisarantis 2006). Consequently I hoped that by applying it to my research setting, I'd quickly find the trigger points needed to create a successful educational intervention to transform students into new economy activists. Implicit in this intention was the view that I was separate, objective and able to manipulate and control situations. However the more I explored the many facets of what a new economy means, the more I felt uncomfortable about the scientific positivist approach I initially wanted to take in this research. One of the critiques of the TPB model that was of particular concern to me is that it assumes people to be too 'rational,' and it doesn't take into sufficient account of cognitive and

affective processes that are known to bias human judgments and behaviour (Ajzen 2011). Considering that the “New Economy movement” is challenging this very assumption– that people are rational, have all the information they need to make perfect decisions etc – using a model that works on the same assumption would be a problem.

Hence I have taken a more constructivist view in this research study which requires:

1. *“The creation of a sense of reciprocity between participants and the researcher in the co-construction of meaning and, ultimately, a theory that is grounded in the participants’ and researcher’s experiences.*
2. *The establishment of relationships with participants that explicate power imbalances and attempts to modify these imbalances.*
3. *Clarification of the position the author takes in the text, the relevance of biography and how one renders participants’ stories into theory through writing”* (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006)

This approach is more consistent with how Sterling (2007) describes the move from our DSP to an ecological worldview which entails a shift in *“emphasis from relationships largely based on separation, control, manipulation and excessive competition towards those based on participation, appreciation, self-organisation, equity and justice.”*

Therefore in this study, similar to Beard et al. (2007), I have adopted a primarily qualitative inductive methodology in order to capture the complexity of the Vega students’ experiences and to allow me to engage and communicate with students. Appleton (1995) also refers to the use of qualitative research to study phenomenon about which little is known. In my instance new economy thinking is still a slightly vague concept as it is being driven by numerous people and organizations and as it describes a “worldview” it does exist in quite a nebulous way. Hart (2003) also notes that there is a trend in education to move towards more qualitative research and that up until now *“our research has been dominated by empirical inquiries that have proven insufficient for understanding the perceptions, feelings, understandings, and motivations of people.”* Colucci-Gray, Giuseppe Barbiero & Gray (2006) expand on this saying that in the currently defined knowledge-based societies, scientific knowledge has taken central place. With respect to teaching socioscientific issues, this model puts emphasis on the cognitive aspects assuming *“a strong connection between the knowledge of the topic and the solution of the problem”*. As I described in my literature review, it has been suggested that focusing on the cognitive domain of education is not enough for the transformative learning needed to take place for a new economy. I believe that the approach I have taken has resulted in findings that extend beyond the cognitive domain and provide insight into other aspects of students’ paradigms that shape their engagement with the new economy concept.

The place of the literature review in inductive research is controversial as it is said to potentially constrain, contaminate or inhibit the researcher (McGhee, Marland, Atkinson, 2007). However, it has also been said that an exploratory review of the literature can be useful prior to the final decision on the general focus and specific method of the study and that *“the purpose of this initial review is to*

increase awareness of the existing knowledge base, and also to identify and avoid conceptual and methodological pitfalls” (McGhee et al, 2007). Therefore prior to my fieldwork I did conduct a literature review in order to understand the predominant themes and complexities around the “new economy” and educating business students for particular values in higher education. This was used to guide the interview questions, and when it came to the findings and discussions I did have a theoretical framework that could be referred to. However, the priority was to be true to the students’ meaning. As Meyer (2011) quotes Gummesson, the key is not to require researchers to have split but dual personalities: *“those who are able to balance on a razor’s edge using their pre-understanding without being its slave”*. In order to avoid becoming too deductive, Baxter & Jack (2008) recommend journaling and discussing feedback with other researchers. In my case, my supervisor fulfilled the role of the latter and guided me away from being too driven by a framework.

### 3.3 The setting

Vega School was founded in 1999 in Johannesburg and has since become a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training as a private higher education institution under the Higher Education Act, 1997 ) with four campuses in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. Vega now offers 20 full-time programmes, twelve part-time programmes and sixteen short courses with a total of about 2 400 students enrolled.

The founders of Vega left another advertising education provider determined that a new approach and curriculum was required for students who would be entering the field of brand building (C. Enslin, personal communication, 2 August 2017). One of the central tenets of the founders’ approach was the idea of meaningful brand thinking – a brand ideology challenging the leaders of businesses and organisations to pursue principles of healthy brand building (Vega Brand Code). This has very much remained a key differentiator in the communications of the Vega brand:

*“The proposed model towards meaningful brand building implements a cohesive and sustainable brand-business design for the benefit of all stakeholders. It positions purpose at the centre of all endeavours and requires that all business decisions and actions deliver the brand’s unique reason for being” (Vega Brand Code).*

Vega describes its values as follows:

- *“We believe that brands with meaning add value to how people live their lives.*
- *We believe an organisation is responsible for its every decision and action.*
- *We believe in the human imagination, in creativity and its power to impact what people think, feel and do.*
- *We believe in borderless knowledge and a striving for excellence” (Vega Brand Code).*



Tideman et al (2013) describe how, in any sustainability scenario, organisations need to shift their marketing paradigm from one of enhancing consumer demand to a more balanced focus on serving consumer needs. This is very much in line with Vega's communicated values.

Another very important philosophy that underpins the Vega brand is the concept of navigation. This concept is carried through from the name of the brand itself (Vega is the brightest star in the constellation of Lyra, and has guided vessels and their captains to navigate their courses safely across the seas) to the titles of the academic and administration staff (academic navigators, relationship navigators, etc.) to the encouraged pedagogy of teaching and learning. This refers to the belief in guidance, rather than top-down direction and attempting to impart knowledge by decree (C. Enslin, personal communication, 2 August 2017).

### **3.4 Data sources**

The primary sources of data were final-year Vega Johannesburg students. By using a number of student participants from different degrees, the aim was to reduce subjectivity and personal bias in the findings through the triangulation of data sources (Gaya & Smith, 2016). The validity of the data is thus enhanced by resolving the discrepancies among different informant reports (Meyer, 2011). I also interviewed Vega lecturing staff and referred to a number of Vega marketing documents. While these were not primary sources of data, they did provide an additional element of triangulation and verification of how the students were reflecting on their own experiences.

All third-year Vega Johannesburg students were sent an email invitation to participate in this study. Students were also invited in class by the researcher and other Vega academic navigators to participate. The Vega alumni Facebook page was used to make contact with alumni, although only a very small number responded. Arrangements for the interviews were made directly with the researcher via email and the majority of these interviews took place on the Johannesburg Vega campus. At the commencement of the interviews, participants were required to sign a consent form introducing the purpose of the study and reassuring them that what was said during the interview would be kept confidential so their identity would be protected. Data that would identify the student was removed from the interview transcripts so that no names would be revealed.

A total of twenty-one final-year Vega students and two Vega alumni were interviewed. While this number is low, it does fall between the range of a dozen to sixty which is advised by Adler and Adler for qualitative research and the range of twenty to thirty mentioned by Bryman in a paper compiled by Baker and Edwards (2012).

*Table 5: Overview of data sources*

Category	Number	Method
Final-year students	21	In-person interviews
Alumni	2	Email questions
Lecturers	4	In-person interviews
Leadership and administration	1	Skype call
Marketing documents	2	Reading and analysis

*Table 6: Degrees represented by data*

Degree	Number
BBA in brand building & management	4
BCom strategic brand management	3
BA in creative brand communications	13
BA in strategic brand communications	3

### 3.5 Data collection

For this study I used semi-structured one-on-one interviews to engage with study participants. The interview guide was approved by the UCT ethics committee. Interviews have the advantage of a high response rate (Appleton, 1995). I experienced this personally as the response I got from students to an interview was much higher than the response I got from alumni to an email questionnaire. Each interview was approximately forty-five to sixty minutes long. Interviews are well suited to exploring attitudes, values, beliefs and motives, and the use of a semi-structured interview allows for additional probing and clarification (Barriball & While, 1994). The value of using a semi-structured interview meant that I could address certain key points, but was able to maintain the exploratory nature of the study by not being too restricted by a limited set of questions. As the interviews took place over a couple of months, this allowed me to refine and reformulate questions as insights and theme patterns emerged.

The majority of these interviews were conducted face-to-face at a time and place of the participant's choosing. The majority of them were conducted on the Vega Johannesburg campus as this was most convenient for students. They were tape recorded so that I could concentrate on maintaining a level of engagement with the student and ask additional probing questions. One of the potential risks of face-to-face interviews is that the researcher's involvement in the interview means that they are collaborating in the production of data, and they therefore need to acknowledge their own biases and how these may influence the results (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

As a single definition of the new economy paradigm does not yet exist let alone measurements for its construct, I had to draw on numerous sources of literature to develop my interview questions. The New Ecological Paradigm Scale developed by Dunlap (2008) would probably come closest to my

needs but is of more use in a quantitative study. This was a challenging process and after conducting three pilot interviews I needed to adapt my interview to avoid using terms like GDP and values, which have specific meanings but were not easily understood by students. In this sense trying to explain the “new economy” paradigm is very difficult as it seems to be surrounded by jargon like social justice, solidarity, systemic thinking, anthropocene.

The questions in my study were primarily trying to determine the presence of new economy thinking and values within students and how their educational experience may have contributed / subtracted from this. I was very conscious to avoid leading students and so I didn’t give them a description of the new economy upfront. The interview questions therefore commenced very broadly to build rapport while trying to understand what led students to choose this particular degree and what they planned to do after graduation. The next set of questions were also broad as I asked students about how they believed they’d changed over the time they’d been a student at Vega – I really wanted to hear things from their perspective as much as possible without relying on “new economy lingo”. At this point I started to question them more specifically about their views on matters such as the “purpose of business”, sustainability, inequality, happiness etc. Lastly I gave them a description of the new economy movement and asked them for their opinions on it. What was interesting was how the structure of the interview questionnaire actually acted as a ladder and many of the new economy issues were raised by students themselves as they considered their own development over their degrees and how they imagine their futures to be. The last question garnered a lot of engagement from the participants and I would’ve loved to spend more time with more students just asking them about their thoughts on the ideals of a new economy. In this way as Myers & Newman (2007) point out, I do feel that as a researcher I was involved in the construction of students’ knowledge / beliefs around a new economy. Many of the students reflected on how much they’d enjoyed the interview process and how it has resulted in them thinking about things they hadn’t previously – in particular: is a new economy really possible? This feedback gave me food for thought as to further research which I’ll discuss in the conclusion. The interview schedule is included in the appendix for review (APPENDIX B).

The recordings were transcribed verbatim and entered into a CAQDAS, NVivo11. The advantage of transparent use of CAQDAS increases the ability of a researcher to leave a comprehensive and exhaustive audit trail of the analysis, which provides greater transparency and credibility (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012)

### **3.6 Data analysis**

One of the stages most at risk to the validity and reliability of a qualitative study is when it comes to data analysis (Appleton, 1995). I therefore hope to be transparent and detailed in my description.

As the new economy paradigm is still being expanded and refined (and in fact will most likely never be given a concrete definition) I really wanted to “suspend any pre-existing theoretical expectations or biases before data analysis, and let the data dictate the formulation of the theory” (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Therefore an inductive approach to data analysis like grounded theory was more appropriate. At the same time I didn’t want to lose the wealth of literature that exists on education for sustainability, transformational and affective learning etc. Consequently I also referred to Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) who expound on the Gioia methodology. In this article the authors discuss their systematic inductive approach to concept development, which they argue “balances the (often) conflicting need to develop new concepts inductively while meeting the high standards for rigor demanded by our top journals.”

One of the ground assumptions these authors make, and that I similarly make, is that “the organisational world is socially constructed... and that the people constructing their organisational realities are ‘knowledgeable agents’. Therefore, in the early stages of data gathering and analysis one needs to strive to be unconstrained by existing theories and ensure that the voice of the study participants is being represented prominently” (Gioia et al., 2012). My approach, therefore, when commencing data analysis was to rely heavily on the words of the students to develop initial coding and themes— see below the extract from some of the initial level 1 coding. This gave more opportunity for new concepts to surface than perhaps otherwise would have if I’d been restricted by the frameworks already exposed in the literature.

*Table 7: Example 1 of first order coding in students words*

Learning to work with others through group projects
Learning about other people while socialising
Collaboration is of value
Vega culture embraces diversity - everyone at Vega is so unique
Experience of diversity has broadened my perspective
Creative development taught me about myself and how to respect others
Design thinking / human centred design
Lecturers encouraged me not to make assumptions
I've learnt empathy - trying to put myself in someone else's shoes
Our differences are interesting - Im curious about people
Less self-centered
Systemic thinking / recognise interdependence
I've learnt to consider the effects my actions my have on others

So for example, in the EFS literature, educators are strongly encouraged to promote and provide opportunities for collaboration due to the number of positive outcomes that can result with respect to shaping beliefs, behaviour and delivering better solutions. However if I’d immediately coded the above statements as results of collaboration I might have missed out on some of the nuances of how the students experienced collaboration in a meaningful way within the Vega context. So in this case

where something the student said rang a bell in terms of literature I had encountered already, a memo was made of this so it could be referred to at a later stage. This initial first-order resulted in well over seventy codes – something to be expected and valued at this stage (Gioia et al., 2012) – and I had to go through a few iterations while patterns began to emerge and the first-order codes could be clustered further. Research was still ongoing at this point, as is often the case in qualitative research – the steps do not necessarily follow in a precise fashion.

After the first-order coding I did a second-order analysis to incorporate theoretical concepts that had been generated in the literature review. Gioia et al (2012) describe how at this point the researchers treats themselves as knowledgeable agents who need to think both at the informant level and at the more abstract theoretical level. To illustrate the students didn't mention the term "institutions" or "Homo economicus" yet taken from the literature these themes helped explain what may have been going on in what the students were describing.

*Table 8: Example 2 of first order coding in students words*

Companies don't care about damaging the environment as long as they're making money - profit is the point
The rules of business don't allow companies to put purpose before profit
We've been doing things a certain way for so long - certain beliefs are so engrained
It's harder for established brands to change
Human nature is greedy, divisive, self-serving, wants convenience & instant gratification
It's hard for me and brands to feel the consequences of our negative actions on the environment etc
Pessimism / cynicism / fatalism - I think that we're all going to become a bit of a metallic robotic world
Money makes the world go round
Big businesses are immune to ethical failures

According to Gioia et al (2012), this systematic tandem approach of reporting informant and researcher voices has helped increase the rigour of this qualitative approach.

The findings section is very important in telling the story of the Vega students and I used their quotes extensively as recommended by Gioia et al. (2012) to exemplify the findings. In the discussion section I incorporated the findings from my literature review as well as other literature that had become relevant in light of the research findings.

On reflection, I'm very grateful that I allowed myself to take a more inductive exploratory approach to this study. Although my conclusion does not deliver a neatly packaged educational intervention ready to be applied , it has opened up avenues of exploration that I would not otherwise have uncovered such as the need for empowering collective action and how Homo economicus is such a powerful lens through which students view their world. I also would not have realised the importance of how development of a solid healthy sense of identity is critical for students to be more open to other ways

of thinking and being. In my discussion and conclusion I elaborate on these points further.

### **3.7 Study limitations**

One of the biggest criticisms of the case study methodology, particularly in the instance of a single case study, is that the results are not generalisable to a wider population. Yin (2003), however, compares the case study to an experiment where results are generalisable to theoretical propositions (analytic generalisation) and not to populations or universes (statistical generalisation). One therefore chooses the case purposefully, rather than using statistical sampling as the goal is not statistical generalisation.

Another common criticism of the case study is the lack of rigour where the researcher has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2003). To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I aimed for data triangulation, audit recordings and verbatim transcriptions, the use of computer-assisted software (which facilitated clear audit trails), detailed descriptions of the context, considerable engagement with participants, and direct quotations to support findings. As the researcher I was also working alone, which reduced my ability to reflect on findings, etc. with a team, I relied on my supervisor to play devil's advocate.

The interviews relied on self-disclosure on the part of the students and, due to the nature of the topic being fairly personal, this may have subdued the honesty of the students in their responses. The advantage, however, of the semi-structured interview is that I was able to probe further and engage more deeply into a student's initial response.

A limitation, that is also an advantage, is that I have worked at Vega as a lecturer in the past. According to Campbell et al. (2013), it is important to have knowledgeable coders when working with in-depth semi-structured interviews, as this type of data often involves interpreting what respondents mean in their answers to questions. Doing so correctly requires that coders have sufficient background knowledge in the subject matter of the interviews. In this, I have an advantage as I have worked previously at Vega in the field of branding, so I was able to interpret specific codes and Vega and industry parlance without losing significant meaning. This is helpful in the sense that I was better able to understand the context in which students were positioned, but it is a limitation in that my own experience may have coloured my interpretation of their meaning. It is for this reason that in my analysis, I tried to stay close to students' words.

As I was concerned that my previous status as a lecturer may have influenced students' responses due to the power relationship imbalance, I reiterated to students that this was completely voluntary and that I had no influence over future academic successes. On the flipside, as I was not a complete stranger to the students, the interviews moved more quickly into an open and easy conversation, as opposed to needing to break the ice.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings on the two research questions:

- How students reflect a new economy mindset
- What the factors are in their educational experience that have encouraged/discouraged this mindset

Research question one: how students do or do not reflect a new economy mindset

There are five predominant themes and eight subthemes in this section. Each of the main themes will be discussed under separate headings.

*Table 9: Research question one themes*

Main Theme	Subtheme
<b>Theme 1: Awakened consciousness and conscience</b>	1.1. Recognition of other ways of being
	1.2. Valuing the other:
	1.3. Discomfort with status quo
<b>Theme 2: Self-discovery</b>	2.1: Self-discovery and values
	2.2: Self-discovering and valuing the self
<b>Theme 3: Motivations</b>	3.1 I want an authentic life
	3.2 I want a creative life
	3.3 I want a meaningful life
<b>Theme 4: Limiting beliefs</b>	4.1. The real world isn't authentic
	4.2 Homo economicus
	4.3 The system is too big
<b>Theme 5: Coping mechanisms</b>	

### 4.1 Theme 1: Awakened consciousness and conscience

IE17: *"You can't fix a problem before you're aware that it's there, you can't fix something that you don't know exists. So I think, obviously, Vega teaching us about this and teaching us how things are done, but then also teaching us how things could be done differently, as in not so much with the main focus being on money..."*

Vega students describe their time at Vega as a "journey" and a large part of that journey is coming to the realisation that everything is not quite right with the world. However, before a remedy for the problems within the existing economic system can be found, there needs to be an awakening to the institutions and accepted norms that are causing distress and harm to other beings in society. In this, students acknowledge Vega as being partly responsible for helping open their eyes. The students use

language like lateral thinking, broader thinking, critical thinking and different perspectives to describe how they are changed as a result of their time at Vega.

One student in particular has become very aware of how the “truth” we believe in this world is subjective and is defined by human-made “facts” which govern our thinking and behaviour. He also recognised that our existing system is no longer serving society, but that getting around it is very difficult. When the student described it as being difficult to move forward to a new system, he was not even referring to the technical challenges of cutting down on consumption, etc., but rather the beliefs that prevent us from thinking we could exist in another way.

*IE12: “We’re living in an old system, you now what I mean? Like and it’s, it was designed for an old world with old beliefs, you know what I mean? ...I mean like I think we’re so lost in thinking in a certain structure and framework that there’s a lot of things that we’re not exploring to the extent that we should. And we’re so stuck up on issues that we can’t actually move forward. And I think that just goes down to the way it’s been, the foundation has been laid.”*

### **Subtheme 1.1: Recognition of other ways of being**

Overwhelmingly, when I asked students how they have changed since arriving at Vega in their first year, the students responded using the analogy that their “bubble” had been popped. These bubbles referred to the worldviews the students held as a result of their background, particularly where the students’ family, home life and a pre-tertiary schooling was lacking in diversity of race, gender, religion or income. The primary cause of the bubble being popped was mere exposure to people who are not exactly the same as them.

*IE8: “So I think the environments we grew up in, it was, especially from the private angles that, it was, we didn’t have as many coloured people in our classes, which was also a big adjustment for us coming to Vega. Because it is, it’s a mix of both races and genders and classes. Whereas we were very almost elitist in our bubble.”*

*IE10: “... in the house where you live in that bubble. And then when you’re exposed to like universities or colleges, it’s a whole different experience because you experience... Like you’re exposed to people from different cultures and have different values and it also just makes you see how everyone is so different”*

Despite the fact that students recognised that having their bubble popped could be uncomfortable, they perceived value in being exposed to different perspectives and ways of being. In fact, a couple of students had actively chosen Vega in order to move away from their comfort zone.



*IE 23: "I think it's the best thing that ever happened to me as a person. I'm not saying that they're bad, it's just it's nice to get away and grow as an individual and not like have this perception, or it's nice to mix and be with other people and other cultures and... because at King David we were just in a bubble and it's just like you get to the point where you... and so, from there I've grown as a person, where Vega has like helped me grow as a person and come out of that bubble."*

Having their "bubble popped" meant that their existing beliefs were challenged and could potentially be replaced with new ones. So in the below examples, two students – one who believed that women should not smoke and one who believed that all white people are wealthy – had the opportunity to learn for themselves through their own direct personal experience that the beliefs they always took for granted were not necessarily true.

*IE4: "My mindset has definitely changed because I was coming from a small, traditional society where, I'll give you an example, where I came from I wasn't used to seeing women smoking. Then I come here and then I see... Okay sure, it's cool. Like it's not a thing. You see so there what I've seen has changed my mentality."*

*IE14: "Because I met... You know the perception in our country especially in Africa is, you know, everyone who's white is born into privilege. And it was fascinating for me to see that there were my white counterparts who had to work really hard to pay themselves off at Vega. So it changed the perception of everyone who is of lighter skin colour who's born into privileges, you know. Even if they are privileged, but how they really worked hard to get themselves into Vega and then third year and still pushing so hard for the grades. It changed how I think."*

The awakening that students had was predominantly around the realisation that there are other ways of being that had not been apparent to them, as a result of a limited exposure to different worldviews: "there's no such thing as a wrong answer for you, for instance" said of one of the students.

Based on the literature review, where I highlighted the importance of a new way of thinking in order to facilitate the birth of a new economy, this response was particularly interesting, so I tried to unpack it further – to understand more specific ways in which their bubbles were popped. Beyond a more generic sense, the students referred to learning about things they "never knew existed" (IE17).

### **Othering**

*IE8: "I was very impacted by othering... when you see yourself as one class or you see yourself as one entity, and then there's the other. Which, I mean, as a whole is wrong because we're all..."*

*IE9: "But unless it's pointed out to you, you don't consider it to be."*

*IE8: "Yes, you're not going to notice."*

**Environment**

IE19: "... the use of Critical Studies, I had thought we were going to be looking at media the whole time and to get to now be taught about the environmental side of things and dig deeper into things, and it doesn't keep you in such a narrow way of thinking."

**Gender**

IE25: "For me it's been Critical Studies, even though at the time it seemed like a bit of a schlep and it's horrible studying for those tests. But the concepts actually really opened my mind quite a lot. You know, we did the body module where you learn about the LBGT."

IE26: "I might have been like a little bit close-minded in terms of bisexual people, you know what I'm saying? Like the different sexualities or things that were going on in the world. Like you don't really... I think, I don't know, it's just really opened my mind and changed the way that I've seen a lot of things."

**Feminism**

IE9: "I mean like, for me, Crit. 2 was, I mean when feminism was introduced, I still thought, ah my gosh. I don't want to go to that class. It's going to be a nightmare and now if you had to ask me about feminism, I can have a whole conversation with you."

**Race**

IE4: "So I think the moment, partly understanding like the moment I, like we understand that not all white people are racists and all white people are privileged and all that, that's when the mindset can change and that's when..."

**Religion and culture**

IE5: "And then from there it just shows like some of them are like into Buddhism or like, for instance, and then they see like the world from a different perspective."

These comments came in response to general questions about which courses/projects, etc. had impacted the student the most, or when following up on a general statement about how specifically their thinking had changed. What is striking about this is that students studying branding-related degrees rarely mentioned that they were different people because of a branding-related discipline. They did refer to specific courses and projects that had prepared them technically for their future careers, etc., but it was this new way of thinking to which they attributed the deepest meaning and value.

One student, from a privileged religious school background, described an awakening moment she experienced during a Brand Strategy guest speaker's talk that left her feeling distressed because there are other worlds coexisting with hers, yet she knew nothing about them. The guest speaker was describing the failings of the advertising industry where a white male creative is required to develop

an advertising campaign targeting young black females. The guest speaker instead discussed the example of a young black creative who used the traditional Kasi “Seven Colour Sunday” meal to create a much more meaningful campaign.

*IE6: “No, when he said to me that one girl came in and she said she wants to do the seven colours. I was like done. I went, I called my mom after. I was like ma, I’m distraught. So she said what’s wrong. I said I don’t know what the seven colours are. She said [name] what are you talking about? I said I don’t know what the seven colours are. How do I not know what the seven colours are? I said I’m going into marketing and branding and ninety per cent of my market is going to be black people and I don’t know anything about their culture. And I went home and I said to my nanny what are the seven colours?”*

*IE6: “Seeing things from a different perspective. Not thinking that like, I don’t really know how to explain it, but literally just that seven colours thing... I’ve spent like... I wanted to cry.”*

It was ironic in a way that this otherwise self-described “privileged” student was recognising that her “advantage” had actually disadvantaged her in such a way that may make it difficult for her to create meaningful copy for campaigns in the future (she is a copywriter). Her distress was very real though and I did not have the answer as to how she could cross the gap. However, the next section probably holds the key to answer that question – engaging and collaborating with the other.

### **Subtheme 1.2: Valuing the other**

Beyond just passively learning *about* “the other”, Vega third-year students professed to a deeper level of appreciation *for* it. They discussed how their own way of thinking and doing has been changed because of their exposure to other ways of being – they are fundamentally different:

*IE9: “Critical Studies, year two. Wow, that changed my entire perception of humanity, society and how I approach social beings as a whole.”*

This appreciation of “the other” has even caused changes in students’ own identities.

*IE2: “And in first year if you told me I was a feminist, I’m like no but I’m not a girl. I wouldn’t have got it, you know what I mean? I wouldn’t have had the thought process to be oh no, feminists, actually everyone should be a feminist.”*

For the most part, students responded with humility and a desire to know more about other perspectives, rather than rejecting and shutting down other perspectives. This is described in how students interact with each other in informal social settings and formal group project settings:

*IE17: "But if I can show one of my friends that, you know, there's another side to the story, so he may have a very specific view of something, if I can enlighten him on something, on a different angle, for instance, it, sort of, and I think that's helped, or that's been a big part of me at Vega, because I've gained a lot of that from other people, not just my, like, close personal friends but anyone in my class or from different degrees or whatever, that's been a big part of my Vega experience."*

*IE5: "You should like see it from another perspective and I think that's what Brand Challenge taught me as well. A lot of the time where like I thought it was right it became wrong and then someone else's perspective was actually right, so you just learn those things."*

What is not clear in the above is why the students made the shift toward welcoming other perspectives. Is it as a result of this time of life where they are more receptive to other ideas and their identities are more fluid? Is it a certain approach that Vega uses to explore these other ways of being and the facilitation of the students' engagement with it?

### **Problem-solving**

Students also learnt that engaging with "the other" is a potentially rewarding, fruitful experience. For example, students identified how the ability to be more open to other views is a valuable skill for problem-solving. The below examples describe how incorporating new perspectives into a solutioning process meant students could develop something more meaningful and appropriate than if they had just relied on their existing assumptions. The quality of solution is better.

*IE4: "I think it makes you understand people from different backgrounds – one, first of all. And then it makes you look at like different problems and different solutions like on a large scale. It makes you... It look... just coming up with different solutions. It just opens up a lot of things, whereas you might have done things in a specific way because of certain things."*

The ability to look at things from different angles has also moved from a conceptual, abstract skill to something very tangible. In the below example, the student refers to a task for Creative Development where they had the chance to turn something as mundane as a plastic water bottle into something with a completely different purpose. This simple exercise is framed by the student as an "opportunity" – the student perceives the benefit of this.

*IE17: "We've been given the opportunity to break down a Valpre bottle and make something out of it and it should be something completely different... So we've been given the opportunity to... I don't know how to put it in different words, to explore with something that might have been the norm and now we make use of only what you have maybe to supply to society."*

Including a diversity of perspectives within a group is also seen by students as being able to supply a wider quantity of solutions.

*IE9: "It's kind of like if you look at Brand Challenge, for example, I mean, you get like three or four groups that are given the exact same client, but no one's going to come back with the exact same idea, which is brilliant."*

### **Collaboration**

Another major topic under this theme of engagement with "the other" is that students identified how they are now able to collaborate with different people because they do not just shut down views that are different to theirs. They have learnt to leverage different people's skills and views to develop a better outcome for all, rather than trying to push their own individual agendas.

*IE11: "I've learnt to work in groups, which is a big thing. I've always been used to working alone. I think just working with other people because generally like in my gap year and at school you got always to choose who you wanted to work with. And at this stage you get a lot of times where you just get dumped in a group and you have to make it work."*

*IE3: "Oh, Vega's taught me how to collaborate. I was not a group-work person at all. It's such a huge thing actually."*

### **Interdependence**

Beyond just learning about "the other", students have realised how interconnected everything is – these different "bubbles" are all living off the same oxygen:

*IE12: "Yes. It's like I think lateral thinking is the most beneficial thing because you... I always used to take things so literally like and it never really helped because you'd have this one-dimensional way of thinking and everything would always come down to this root problem. Whereas if you look at something laterally, you kind of realise that everything works like a small ecosystem, like small bits of everything in everything else. So essentially you've got to, I don't know hey, like... I just, I feel like we've learnt very good... It's like, it's weird to say, it's like you've learnt how to think."*

In order to survive within this interconnected web, students have become cognisant that they need to consider how their own actions may affect others.

*IE10: "... like taught me a lot to be like more consciously aware of like when I'm actually creating a project or something that it's not like harming anyone in a sense, I guess."*

*IE10: "And yes, those things still stick with us, but like even like our communities around us and that what Vega's actually exposed us to and taught us it's actually made us more like aware. And actually realising that like we have, we are going to make an impact because whatever we put out there*

*everyone's going to see and it's making us more consciously aware that like we need to make sure that whatever we're doing has like a value to it and is doing some good."*

*IE14: I think as a whole it's systemic thinking, I think that's the basis of it all. I think if you understand the systems that are in place we can change."*

### **Subtheme 1.3.: Discomfort with status quo**

This awakened consciousness has triggered an awakened conscience within students – being able to recognise the effects of various institutions and behaviour has led to a sense of discomfort with the status quo, be it patriarchy, inequality or environmental degradation.

*IE8: "... learning about things like feminism and that sort of thing. Looking... And now when I'm in an environment I can actually spot those sort of things. Whereas before it wouldn't have phased me. Things like the way people talk, I talk."*

*IE8: "I've always noticed climate change, but since my bubble almost was popped at the beginning, now noticing more things."*

Students also reflect a sense of responsibility to use their new skills to do things differently and effect change in the world.

*IE10: "Like there's so many problems, even in the advertising world where like they objectify women and all those other problems that I could actually use my skills for something like also better."*

*IE12: "Like I think it's very cool that we learn all these things to like work in the industry and advertising what not, but ultimately I think we develop very strong critical thinking skills at Vega and to... It's just going to say like everything I've done is a waste, but to waste that on advertising seems silly to me. So I think we really have, we can do a lot more than we think we can. I don't know like I kind of want to use what I've learnt here to go into advertising, but then maybe what I learn in the advertising industry I actually want to do something more... Like I want to save the planet kind of vibes."*

## **4.2. Theme 2: Self-discovery**

*IE14: "... think what happens is here I think initially I had so many self... I think I had a very weird self-image, image of myself. But coming here I became very comfortable and self-confident, you know, I think that's the power of education. It's I don't care how privileged you are... it's nothing compared to someone who has a knowledge of self and a knowledge of the world."*

*IE12: "Like you not only get a degree when you come through Vega, you also learn a lot about yourself."*

Along with awakened consciousness, the theme of self-discovery was very strong. Many students told me about how they had arrived at Vega very unsure about what they really wanted to do with their lives. They discussed the huge pressure they felt when making university and degree decisions to know what they *"want to do for the rest of my life"*. What was interesting was how much more content they seemed to be, even though they still couldn't say exactly what it was they were going to do until retirement. They appeared to be more flexible and open to options, but they discovered an inner compass to help them make future decisions.

*IE17: "... so getting to Vega I already felt very confused and not sure, like, what I wanted to do and what I was really good at or what else I was interested in. So I would say the first day that I got to Vega, I don't know how to put it, I guess, like I wanted answers, I wanted to know what I was good at and where my strengths really lay. And then from that, like, to now I think, and I'm still very unsure, honestly, but I have more direction, I have a lot more, a better foundation, I'd say, because of what I've learnt here, both in the classroom and also socially, like socialising with other people that have come to Vega and gaining a different perspective."*

*IE4: "I don't know. So yes, I think Vega kind of helps you know what you actually really like and lets you go forward with it."*

### **Subtheme 2.1: Self-discovery and values**

The students described how this journey of self-discovery was not about becoming a different person, but rather uncovering the set of values that already existed within them. Being able to articulate what their values are led to a stronger ability to incorporate them into one's life.

*IE2: "Like I said, it kind of solidified my values for me because like this model that I've mentioned it kind of challenges me to question those values and interrogate them. So, through doing that I was able to appreciate it more and kind of stand by it."*

*IE22: "Vega was very influential, but I would not say it is the primary reason I hold the values I hold today. It definitely augmented my values, and reinforced their importance in a way that was empowering because now I have the academic vocabulary to express the values I've always held high."*

*IE3: "... feel like I've always had my values, but I feel like Vega as an institution has helped like cement them."*

Most students attributed their base values to their parents, particularly their mothers.

*IE10: "I just it's like even like the way I was brought up like my parents are very like aware of their surroundings and always like if someone's in need they'll like put others before them."*

*IE16: "Upbringing, probably my mother. My mother was very strict. In-house, she made sure that I was never straying away from what makes a good person, essentially."*

*IE2: "I think it comes from my parents – the two people that have shaped me the most. And how their beliefs and morals have trickled down to me, you know."*

However, there were plenty of examples where students discussed how they had stepped away from their upbringing as a result of their journey of self-discovery and realising what was important to them.

*IE24: "I think my values basically came from my upbringing, so your parents teach you the way things should be done, the right from the wrong. But when you actually enter the real world and you actually have to fend for yourself, a lot of those things change. A lot of those things change where, like, the way you see a person changes, the way you interact with people changes. It becomes, like, a whole different ball game that you have to relearn, redevelop, basically."*

*IE25: "I wouldn't really say my parents. Shame, my parents are like the last environmentally conscious. I mean they recycle, but they don't really do anything else. I think I've just been heavily influenced by what I feel is right. And when you realise something is wrong in your own heart, you know that it's just not right."*

*IE10: "Just like, I came from like a religious background and then, I don't know, Vega just... I felt that like this is a place you could be anyone that you really wanted to be. Like be your true self because no one really judged you. Like everyone was just who they are and it kind of like gave me the strength to actually just be comfortable in myself and like be who I want to be. And like realise that like I'm not such a religious person and they like stand on the like level of religion that I'm not actually comfortable with. And like not be afraid to like stand out and be a bit different."*

## **Subtheme 2.2: Self-discovery and learning to value yourself is very empowering**

Another aspect of self-discovery that students shared was about learning their *value* – not just their *values*.

*IE25: "I've come to respect my peers more throughout the years, as well as sort of just respect myself. You know, I don't want to... What's the word? Like I don't want to look down on myself and*



*think that I can't do it because I've actually proven myself that I can. And so often I used to do that. So in that way I sort of value myself a bit more."*

Students discussed how they had surprised themselves and others by realising academic or creative potential they never knew they had:

*IE25: "I'm definitely a lot more confident in my ability and well my academic ability, and also my creativeness. I didn't do so well in high school and obviously studying hairdressing doesn't really give you that space to be academic. So I thought that I was going to be one of those students that are just like passing, you know. And, you know, I really shocked myself, and I still continue to shock myself. I'm like holy crap I actually did well. So there's that."*

*IE23: "I think I have become more confident and I've let my creativity show more, and my imagination show more. I'm not as scared as I was. I have more belief in myself and it's shown me like I really have ability and potential, and that I can do what I want to do."*

One student discussed the example of a relative whom the family had "written off" as a failure. Through this relative's time at Vega, however, he uncovered his own unique talents and abilities and has made a success for himself in his niche.

The ability to think of different ways of being and realising one's own potential has changed the below students' outlooks about life. They describe being much more positive about the future and are open to possibilities.

*IE15: "I viewed life differently; I've had a different perspective when it comes to life, because I don't come from a wealthy background. So how I view life now it's just like anything is possible, I can do anything as long as I have education and I just see things from a different perspective and I think positivity in anything."*

*IE3: "I think it has because I think it's shown that like there's so much, so many possibilities in terms of like what I can do. That has made me, that's actually made me really happy. I mean, I was studying accounts and I thought the only way was to be an accountant. And I think the happiness is in like the fact that I can be whatever I want."*

#### **4.3 Theme 3: Motivations**

Students' ultimate goal in life is to be happy. Happiness for the majority of the Vega students interviewed was not defined purely by how much money they imagined themselves making in the future. However, in many instances it was understood to be very instrumental in paving the path for students to attain that happiness:

*IE26: "I don't think material things can make you happy. It can make you feel more comfortable and at ease, but I don't think it can make your overall happiness. Like I've just have had family members that are so wealthy, but they don't have any family to share that wealth with."*

*IE8: "I think having some material wealth makes it easier to be happy. It's not necessarily what makes happiness, but it's definitely, even if it is a type of ignorance, it makes it a lot easier to be. Because you're not worried about rent every month. There's a lot more less of a stress from the economic side and that's a good thing."*

*IE17: "Because of money you can, sort of, start a family, you can comfortably raise kids and it gives, it opens so many doors for you, but it's, it can also be abused and it's, I don't know how to say it... Yes, I think the biggest problem is that we, we don't place emphasis on what's good for us."*

On the whole, Vega students recognised that having too much money opens up the possibility for it to be abused. They also understood that having enough money to buy a lot of material trappings is not necessarily going to increase one's happiness.

*IE15: "So I feel like brands that are now adding value and adding a fulfilment that's within, which I don't know if it's like a mental thing whereby it's just a temporary thing, you feel fulfilled, at the end of the day when you go home you're just not fulfilled anymore, so it's temporary thing."*

*IE7: "Whereas if you have non-materialistic things, I feel like happiness, success, all of those are non-materialistic, and then you know you'll live a more full life, if that makes sense."*

Loving one's work was also recognised as being very important if students feel they will be able to be happy in the future. There were a few things students are looking for in their careers in order to be fulfilled by their work: their work should allow them to express themselves in a creative way and ideally contribute to society in a meaningful way.

### **Subtheme 3.1: I want an authentic life**

Given that students describe how they now have a better sense of themselves, it seems as if they want to live a life and follow a career path that is true to their identities and interests. In a very practical way, students gave examples of how they do not want to be restricted by a corporate uniform – they would like to dress in a way that reflects who they are. They also do not want to be micromanaged, but trusted to perform to the potential that they have learnt is within them.

*IE12: "Personally I don't want to go work wearing a suit and a tie any time, you know. I think that's also a very old way of thinking, that like if someone looks in a certain way he's professional. No, so I want to be in a position where I can just wear this and then come see you and do good work."*

*IE19: "I always thought when you work at a Nestle, it's Nestle shirt, wear black jeans or whatever the story is, but no, it's like here and you do your thing and as long as you meet your deadlines there's no one standing here like are you done yet?"*

When discussing their future careers, only a handful of students had very specific ideas of what this would look like. However, the students often used the word "passion" and how they wanted their careers to be linked to their "passions" in the long term.

*IE17: "Anything that I'm passionate about, I mean, obviously having money does make me happy because it means that I can, it enables me to, sort of, explore my passions further, so in that way, yes, it does make me happy. But if I just had money full stop, I wouldn't be happy."*

*IE15: "I think if I do what I'm passionate about and if I find my purpose in life I think that would literally fulfil me, because I wouldn't mind waking up and doing it and whether I'm getting paid for it not, I think I wouldn't mind, because I'd be fulfilled at the end of the day if it's something that I'm passionate about."*

Interestingly enough though, students who seemed vague about their future careers still often participated in some sort of extra-curricular activity that they were very enthusiastic about and claimed to "absolutely love", yet this was rarely a part of future career plans. I got the sense that they were still restricted by the notion of following "sensible" degrees and were hoping to find their passion within the career paths these degrees opened up to them. Is this because students view a future life where their extra-curricular activities may still be a part and they don't need to become a "professional" dancer in order to be happy? Alternatively, are they sacrificing authenticity because of the old economy belief that dancing is not the "rational being" career decision of choice?

*IE1: "I'm a dancer. I love that. That makes me so happy."*

*IE24: "... love baking, it's like, it's my getaway place, so it's not even like the whole process of making it, it's the whole process of decorating it, and decorating eating that's, like, my getaway, because it's like just making food pretty."*

*IE6: "So basically I'm obsessed with geography. I love the weather and climate and everything."*

There were a couple of students who had an extra-curricular interest and were involved in investigating how this may become part of a sustainable, income-generating lifestyle. One of the female students was passionate about black women embracing their "natural curls" and looking after their hair without chemicals. She would like to start a scalable business out of this interest one day. In the meantime, she shares videos and information on her social media platforms.

*IE2: "Like my feed is, yes, covered in natural hair. But, yes, I use everyday products and just teaching this to young people. If you learnt how to plant a tree, an avo tree, just having that you could supply a stall with avocado conditioner and that is something that can turn into something big. So, that's kind of the thinking I have with my business idea, so..."*

Taking a slightly different angle, a male student discussed the importance of bringing in one's own emotions into the workplace – a place where being authentic has been looked down on as a show of weakness.

*IE17: "I disagree with that. I think love and passion are two of the things that are most, or two of the main things that are missing from most businesses these days. A lot of it is profit driven and I guess that goes back to the gender inequality in the corporate world. The fact that the men are always taught that, you know, business first, emotions second, kind of thing, whereas women have never been afraid to bring emotion into business and it's actually been proven a lot of times that that is the best way to go, to, like, go with what feels best or not just what makes sense on an Excel spreadsheet."*

Authenticity and transparency is also recognised as being an important quality for brands to have:

*IE21: "Vega taught us that brands, big or small, have great actions or responsibility towards society and the public and should be transparent in everything they do and make a positive impact that will affect us in a positive way."*

*IE3: "But I think the whole thing about the whole three-sixty brand, so from the beginning to the end you have to be like transparent."*

*IE23: "You have to have a really genuine and authentic relationship with your consumers... in order to really make an impact on someone."*

### **Subtheme 3.2: I want a creative life**

Another contributor to leading a happy life is the ability and opportunity to be creative. Students seemed to believe that living a creative life would also lead to greater happiness, and they wanted to strive for work that would allow them to be creative.

*IE15: "I don't want to just be put as a copywriter because I studied copywriting, because I believe that strategy has a creative part that comes into play. So I want to apply both the strategy, it must be a strategy-based research or assignment, but it must have creativity within it."*

As is evident in the above example, the student's definition of creativity does extend beyond the arts and they do recognise that different ways of thinking and developing solutions can also be a way of

expressing creativity. However, this is limited by the type of career one follows as students view lawyers or accountants as being boring, narrow-minded and task oriented.

*IE10: "And I was either choosing between law or like advertising. And then I decided to go more the advertising route just because like I love art and like I'm a very creative person, so I wanted to like use my skills and passion to actually like do something with... And like build a career out of it."*

*IE19: "Interestingly enough, I wanted to do accounting before I got caught up on the marketing route, but then I heard how accountants get on with their lives. Apparently I would be in my little cubby and just have to do what I have to do and just get on and I don't think that's me, so yes."*

It seems that when choosing, Vega students believed that marketing/branding degrees offered a compromise between creativity and sensibility. Students want to study something that they believed was creative, but would, at the same time, give them the skills to survive in a bottom line driven world.

*IE16: "... don't want to call it pressure, but the encouragement of my parents to try and get a more financial side to it in order to have the business background, as well as the specialisation in branding and advertising. So that's how I came to the decision."*

Vega students also believe themselves to be more "creatively able" than students doing similar degrees to them at other universities.

*IE24: "... if you go to places like Wits, for example, and I went there, all of their creatives look like lawyers. They are so, you know, to themselves and quiet and boring, if I can say, like, you can't, there's nothing creative about them."*

It must be noted that students identified how the ability to be creative could be used for good or bad – without a set of values underpinning it, the creative graduate can be equally responsible for driving consumerism and encouraging prosocial citizen behaviour.

*IE24: "I think creativity has a huge value in the world, we were actually talking about it yesterday in, well during Brand Strat, that marketing is basically the devil in disguise. So if you think about it, your creativity fuels up ideas that basically sell anything to anybody, so in order to sell it you have to be creative in a way to basically trick people to think that they need it."*

### **Subtheme 3.3: I want a meaningful life**

*IE24: "I guess if you make good money, but it's always not about that. Like I think if you really love what you're doing and you've actually made like an impact to someone or to like actually like made a difference to the world in a sense. I guess that."*

Students also imagine that fulfilment and happiness will come from having a positive impact on the lives of others. Students intended to be meaningful through their work in a number of different ways: in pure philanthropic goals; through the student giving the example of how they would like to work for a brand that makes other people happy; or through the student describing how they would like to create their own meaningful brand. As much as this may be a goal for them, the students did display a sense that doing something meaningful means sacrificing a certain level of financial income and this is a practical consideration given.

### **Philanthropic**

*IE19: "I've actually wanted to have a children's home before... Not something that will necessarily make money, but just something that will have a good impact on someone else's life."*

*IE24: "So I want to basically start up a foundation that basically caters for underprivileged children that come from backgrounds that are not as financially stable, with parents who are very small minded, and basically give them that loophole to basically design."*

### **Through another brand**

*IE23: "I love the creativity and I love like working with brands that have such a history and a story and then like relate to people and impact on people's lives, and the understanding behind it, like the story of Adidas and Puma, and the story of Coca Cola, how it was a cough syrup."*

### **Own brand**

*IE22: "My big career goal is to expand my artistic practice and create a solid imprint on South African culture."*

## **4.4 Theme 4: New economy limiting beliefs**

### **Subtheme 4.1 The real world isn't authentic**

Despite the fact that students recognise that authenticity and transparency are something to be aspired to in themselves and in brands, their personal experience gives testament to many examples of successful brands that are not authentic in what they say they stand for.

The job of brands is to provide a shortcut for consumers to recognise quality and value. However, according to students, brands are taking advantage of the perceptions that their marketing communications create and are not necessarily delivering what their symbol and image promise. Students were quite matter of fact about this – this was not a very emotional topic for them. It was just described as business as usual.

*IE17: "I mean, take Coca-Cola for instance, as much as they claim that there are certain products that they offer that are, I guess, healthy or healthier, it's been proven that they, in fact, aren't and, I mean, they are making so much profit off of what they sell, but what they sell is causing more harm than good for the consumer."*

*IE5: "It's like Nike and Puma and all of those. It's just the brand is sexy. It's well known, but other than that you're paying for a lot and you don't get much out."*

Beyond the product/service not living up to what it says on the package, brands also actively take actions to try and deceive consumers into believing they are something they are not. Students referred to examples of CSI and black economic empowerment (BEE) activities:

*IE8: "Dischem does it in a way that you still buy from them in order to give. So as long as it's helping their bottom line."*

*IE13: "I think they are profit driven, but they camouflage it with being sustainable, like, oh no our chickens live here and they eat this and everything that we get is 100 per cent and we have black workers who are farmers that we're assisting, it's really they tell us what we want to hear."*

*IE24: "And people don't actually realise because they just see this, oh my god, it's a brand, we've traditionally used it for so long, but if the brand changed their formula and use a different chemical, they're not going to tell you if you three quarters of the time and if it's negatively, like, degrading the community in a sense where it's giving them a sickness that they weren't born with, then it's a problem."*

The biggest clincher in this argument against brands needing to be authentic is that they can be very profitable and manage to have longevity without doing so. If profitability is the measure of success in the world of business then how can students argue against any behaviour that promotes profitability.

*IE5: "I disagree with it because some brands don't fulfil all the, I think it's five of them, no seven of them [healthy brand principles], but they still become successful brands either way. I think Vega's very set on a set of rules that they've created, but they're not necessarily real-world, realistic. You can't fulfil every Vega healthy brand thing to be this healthy brand. You have to break some rules to be like..."*

Most of the students used negative examples to illustrate the lack of authenticity in brands. One student was the exception to this and described how she started to see Vega's healthy brand principles "manifest" in certain successful brands around her such as Woolworths and Unilever. Seeing this for herself changed her mindset, with respect to the healthy brand principles, from one of learning them off by heart to pass a test to one of "this is a real thing, you can't ignore that this is

where we're going" (IE2). This points to the importance of sharing real examples of brands that are challenging the old economy's definition of success with students.

#### **Subtheme 4.2: Homo economicus**

What I found interesting was that where students have been able to see other ways of being and come to value these alternatives, it was because they have been confronted with it in a very real way at Vega, and they have personally experienced diversity through their peers and lecturers. Students have learnt to embrace and value other cultural, sexual, etc. ways of being.

*IE24: "So Vega supports that value because they treat us all the same, they give us all the same time, they actually support friendships that are interracial and relationships that are interracial because the lecturers at Vega, just like us, don't see colour, they don't see creed, they just see people."*

However, students have not had a real experience of humans being anything other than Homo economicus and, thus, they struggle to imagine that humans could be anything other than utility/profit maximising beings.

*IE6: "Yes we do need to change the way, but people are so comfortable with the norm that no one's really tried to challenge the story."*

#### **Subtheme 4.3 The system is big and I am small**

Again and again, when I raised the topics of healthy brand, the new economy, consumerism or environmental issues, the students balked at the gigantic opposition of a huge system with too much momentum to change direction. No matter what students have learnt at Vega, *"people here see a different environment out there. So Vega's a small part in a huge system and all that people see is, you know, profit, money, maximum."*

There are a number of interlinked aspects that students attribute to this system:

- The rules of the economy are: *"profit maximisation is the most important thing for a business – making as much money as you can. And that people will always make decisions where they are going to, kind of, I suppose maybe get the most money."*
- Large corporations that *"can't be convinced of the value of doing good for the world"*. Through their brand equity, these corporations manage to remain untouched by the damage they are causing. Students referred to the Nike scandal, from which Nike had emerged relatively unscathed, and Johnson & Johnson, some of whose products allegedly cause cancer but which remains a popular brand. Students also felt that large brands have no other option to continue the way they are if they want to survive:



- IE1: "... mean, the more popular your brand becomes obviously the more you want to use those resources."
  - IE3: "Like I don't know if a brand like Top Shop can survive by not having a billion factories in a billion different places..."
- People are at the mercy of their desire to consume. This is something that students recognised in others and in themselves as being very hard to overcome. One student, who is staunchly Vegan and by all accounts a very ethical, caring person, described how if she saw a top that she loved, and she knew it was made by child labourers, she may sadly still buy it.
- IE5: "So I just think there is no way back, even if we stop consuming. But I mean we need to. We live in the twenty-first century. We strive on technology and we have to live off it. So it's just basically slowing down the process to destruction one day."
  - IE23: "Like I feel because it's there you have to have it. So, like my phone's fine, I don't need a new one, but because it's come out and it's there, I want it because everyone else has it. But it's instant gratification and there's peer pressure there. Something is now and I want it now, give it to me now. So, I feel like consumer demand will never stop It will just get bigger and bigger, and I feel like your friends are a major influence and to be accepted and... I think that's like huge. I don't think that will ever stop and the debate that surrounds the Apple and da da da."
  - IE11: "People always want the latest and greatest, and it's always to keep up with competition. So if Samsung, for example, release their phone every year, people would obviously try go grab the new Samsung device compared to a two-year old Apple that could be running at the same spec as the newest Samsung, but people don't care about... Even at Apple I've learnt, people don't care about the power or the capabilities of the device, they just want the latest."
- An extension of the above point is human nature more broadly. Students describe it as fact that "everyone is profit driven and people are capitalists". People are selfish and greedy and will aim to "secure themselves before all else". A student also discusses how humans are, by nature divisive, and that "they always find means to differentiate ourselves from the next person... we have classism, we have racism, we have religions". This is linked to the point made that students have many examples of "Homo economicus" and find it very difficult to imagine that humankind may actually be reciprocal rather than self-seeking.
- Our busy life styles have led us to value convenience and instant gratification above all else:
- IE11: "But I still believe that people will buy the product, regardless of how healthy it is because it's purely convenience. And I know in America, as an example, it's, fast food, is cheaper than it is to buy like an organic or fresh produce every single day to make a meal."

- IE8: *"I would probably love to do a campaign for Coke on the dangers of plastic. But yes, I still, I hate to admit it, but I still buy their product. But now I'm a little bit less happy about it. IV Okay, so why do you think you still buy their products? IE8 It's convenient."*
- The pressure of "going with the flow" in the work environment is something that students acknowledged may make it challenging for them to stand up for healthy brand/new economy principles.
  - IE16: *"But then meeting other people within that industry, especially older generations and generations, your generation, but that haven't been exposed to the same education and experience at Vega. It's going back to the basic idea of group think. When you're posed with problems or something that you see as unethical, are you willing to stray away and say no, that isn't correct, I'm going to stay true to what I've learned, especially with regards to Vega? So, the answer is maybe for me, because it's hard to say. It's just about that interaction between are you pressured into performing that way or are you willing to stay true to what you've learned?"*
- Students' own survival in this system is dependent on their conforming to it. Therefore, the desire to be meaningful, which students described earlier, is tempered by the necessity to first and foremost ensure that their needs and the needs of their families are met first. So while they also said material goods and money do not equate to happiness, in this system the latter is often only achievable through having money.
  - IE1: *"I've obviously always been a person that believes in like sustainability and believes in cutting down on using those limited resources, but at the same time it's so hard because obviously to move forward I need to do those things. I need to use those resources."*
  - IE4: *"People see the world as harsh, as... You know, that it's, in business, it's profit, it's... You know, you do whatever it takes."*
  - IE8: *"I can't see myself settling into it for too long, but I need to start somewhere because every corporate, you know, is bound to have the same money-making values."*
  - IE21: *"I definitely think they make young students aware of these problems or challenges, but it is left to the individual on whether or not he or she carries that through with him or her or is just looking for any available job. To be honest. Times are tough and jobs are sparse."*

Only one student said that it's a misconception of the wealthy that people without money are unhappy:

*“IE2: You may look there and think: it's so sad, they don't have food. But there's a lot of joy that exists in that space that money can't buy.”*

- The unique context of South Africa and our apartheid history is also an aspect of the system that students acknowledged as being a huge barrier to achieving a just society.
  - *IE16: “... just think it's so deep-rooted in society. Look, I think it's achievable, but I just don't think it's a short-term goal. I think it will take generations of people to achieve equality. I just think it's so deep-rooted in society, especially in South Africa.”*

All together these present a hugely daunting task for an individual who would most likely *“just go with the flow because that's like what more, what's one person going to do (IE6)”*.

Again this is where Vega has a potentially important role to play in teaching students how they can be agents with power in this system. A student referred to her own unsuccessful attempt to affect change within Vega and the lesson that she took from this is that in the “real world” trying to do so would be nearly impossible.

*IE1: I think that being just one individual trying to change the world is... Being one individual trying to change the world, even just a group of people, it's really a really hard thing. So, I mean, even trying to change things within Vega, for me to stand alone and try and speak up it was a hard thing, in one institution. So, to try and change that within thousands of institutions it's just, it's not an easy task,*

#### **4.5 Theme 5: Coping mechanisms**

Students need to have a way of coping with the resulting cognitive dissonance of the ideal brand frameworks they have been taught at Vega and the life choice decisions they already make and will have to make in the future:

*IE14: “But to a regular Joe kid who just comes and just luckily parents had enough money just to send him to school or send him to Vega, his options are he has to work and then he goes into work. Everything that Vega has put in his head, a healthy brand blah, blah, it is not in the real world, do you know what I mean?”*

It seems there are a few things students do to deal with this:

- Students may decide to ignore the negativity and, in some instances, even use their new-found skills to contribute to concealing it. This can be quite easy as the students are often not faced directly with the negative consequences of a failing economic system.
  - *IE5: “I just love how people are like so influenced by simple things and by opinions basically. So I can write anything that sounds good about something that is absolutely*

*terrible and people would believe me. So I love like the whole manipulation. It sounds bad, but it's true. And just making anything sound good. Because I mean we live in such a negative world, so why not make things sound good and yes."*

- *IE1: "I think because we're not directly involved in it, it's not necessarily influencing us. It's not that we don't care, it's just that we don't really get into heated, weak[?] conversation about it. I think that if we were directly involved it would be different."*
- Students may tell themselves that they will do their part to make the world a better place later in life when they have the luxury of money, experience and time.
  - *IE15: "Because there's, I don't think there's any business that maintains those principles or ethics, because if they were they don't mention or award them. Yes, so I don't think so, because after being a graduate what you go for is for the money. For me when you're old, you know, I don't know, you have menopause or you have midlife crisis you'll go about looking for things that fulfil you, but I don't know, I just think it's a front of looking good and having this kind of reputation."*
  - *IE25: "I've always said that, you know, in the beginning I don't mind what I need to do. I want to get that experience and I want to start making money. But at the end of the day, in the long run, WWF (WorldWild Life Foundation) is a brand that I've always had like a bullseye on."*
  - *IE26: "I think initially as a junior you're not going to have much choice regarding who your client is or who your agency is, but when you become more established then you can turn away people. I think it's super important to stick to yourself, as well as your company or agent's essence. And not support industries that are against our own morals. That's my opinion. I've always said that, you know, in the beginning I don't mind what I need to do. I want to get that experience and I want to start making money."*
- Faced by the overwhelming systemic change needed, students seem to have certain non-negotiables/minimum ethical standards that are more easy for them to uphold than tackling change on a greater scale, i.e.: veganism, not wearing real fur, not working for a certain brand.
- Students may justify their own or others' lifestyles by saying that it is a very personal decision, thereby implying that by expecting students to hold a new economy value system upon graduating would be to take away their own personal freedom.
  - *IE19: "Vega can't make sure everyone becomes a healthy brand and that's the hard part, like now why are people going to be done with their degrees and still want to go lie on the beach for another five years first. And it's your urgency and it's your choices at the end of the day."*
  - *IE25: "I think it's really personal. Like I know there's people in our class that are here because their parents put them here. And they really don't care, they're just trying to pass. So I don't know. Yes, it's personal. Like if you really believe in it then..."*

- IE26: "... think it's a personal thing. Like I'm someone who would do that. It's probably because I've invested a lot of time in myself into what Vega stands for to help, I don't know, make myself. Those key things maybe. But I know some people aren't as interested. It's just their thing.'
- IE6: "It's just different people have different values and ideas. And you can't force someone to believe something. You can try. You can't force them."

Research question two: what aspects of their educational experience have shaped students' mindsets

The previous section looked at the beliefs students hold that either strengthen or weaken the possibility that they will contribute to the realisation of a new economy. In this section, I look at the predominant themes relating to the aspects of the students' educational experience that shaped the mindsets described under research question one.

*Table 10: Research question two themes*

Main theme	Subtheme
Theme 6: Freedom to find meaning	
Theme 7: Challenge me to rise to expectations	
Theme 8: Relationship with lecturers	
Theme 9: Smaller classes	9.1. Confidence to pursue opportunities
	9.2. Engagement with peers
	9.3. Engagement with lecturers
Theme 10: Delivering aha! moments	10.1. Nature of the content
	10.2. Systemic approach
	10.3. Making it real
Theme 11: Engagement with diversity	
Theme 12: Institute examples	
Theme 13: External influences	13.1. The power of personal experience
	13.2. Role models

#### 4.6. Theme 6: Freedom to find meaning

Vega professes to take a “navigation” approach to lecturing where academic navigators are *“driven by the ethos of strategic guidance and creative direction as opposed to merely imparting information that is passively absorbed”* (“Vega: who we are”, n.d.). In my interview with Dr Carla Enslin, she also described how Vega *“really avoids the people who train by decree, the individuals ‘who this is my way of doing, I’ve trained students for twenty-five years, they all win creative awards.’”*

This appears to be reflected in how students describe their experience at Vega – they do not feel dictated to and are rather encouraged to use their own creative faculties to determine a solution to a problem. A few students gave examples of project briefs where they were given *“freedom in terms of execution”* and they could *“explore different ways of getting something across”* (IE17) for a particular client. A result of this is that students got to see how many alternatives are actually possible when different groups all end up with unique solutions.

In quite a few instances students shared how this freedom goes as far as the student actually choosing the client they would like to develop a creative brand solution for. One student describes how she feels that this gives her *“a sense of purpose and whatever we do we want to add value to it and actually make that impact.”* She referred to an example of a project she worked on where they *“had to choose like a local brand and actually come up with a campaign for it. There was like no like strict briefs”*. This student’s group chose Musica *“because it’s basically dying in South Africa”*. They wanted to see if they *“could make like a difference and actually... make people actually remember their brand because everyone’s forgetting them”*. They ended up doing a campaign around how deaf people would be able to experience music – something that hearing people take for granted – whenever *“you’re feeling sad or happy like music’s like it always like can cheer you up or just make you more happy. And they never get to experience that, so we like we came up with like a campaign where like they could experience music through colour and vibration and they, even though they couldn’t hear it they could get that like hands-on experience”*. The student described how she wished she could have had the opportunity to actually present this to Musica and make her campaign a reality.

Another student describes a project where she had to choose something to work on for a Loerie entry. After initially wanting to work on a communication campaign to combat the rape crisis in South Africa, she consulted with her lecturer and realised her communication idea would work better to raise awareness around cancer. Ultimately, she created an app to encourage men to test themselves for testicular cancer. The student described how this was actually now the favourite project she had worked on during her time at Vega.

A Creative Development lecturer also described the freedom within briefs that students get. When given the opportunity to choose a project where they feel they can make an impact, students take it

very seriously and often think of things that are very relevant and meaningful to them at that time. *"There's always something, but it's quite interesting because a lot of them have very strong political comments on our government and stuff like that".*

To tie this into the themes discussed under research question one, allowing students a certain scope of freedom within a structured environment allows them to move along the road of self-discovery and explore areas where they can create meaningful solutions.

#### **4.7. Theme 7: Challenge me to rise to expectations**

As much as millennials are criticised as having a sense of entitlement, the feedback I received from the students showed how being challenged was valuable and character forming for them. *"Creative Development was like really nice. I found it like a growing opportunity like in terms of like, especially when you finish something and you were so proud of it . I think that's what's helped me like decide I can be whatever I want, yes" (IE3).* Another student also describes how, after initially not doing well in Creative Development, she decided *"I'm going to prove you wrong and I'm going to show you what I can do"* and worked really hard on making a meaningful project. She describes how when she told her previous Creative Development lecturer about her execution of this new project *"he nearly burst into tears. He was like I cannot believe that you've gone from having a meeting with my mother to doing your own thing" (IE6).*

The challenges that students described experiencing over their time at Vega came in different forms. Lecturers' feedback was mentioned as one of the biggest challenges students had to deal with as they were often pushed by lecturers to improve an idea or even begin again.

*IE11: "I think just the attitude at Vega given by the lecturers where if even if they say no to you, they try challenge you to either fix what you're trying to do or they'll literally throw your idea out completely and you have to start from scratch. And it's not... They don't... If your idea's rubbish, they'll tell you and I think that it drives a person to try get it right every single time so you don't get that, not the fear of rejection, but it's easier to get accepted once then have to do the whole thing again."*

What I found interesting was how students had not become resentful through having their ideas rejected the first time, but seemed to respect their lecturers more for demanding from students what they knew they were capable of achieving. As the student describes below, it also taught him to treat the work he was doing with respect and consideration.

*IE12: "The reason I liked him as a lecturer was because he didn't accept like mediocrity, you know what I mean? So if it's not a good idea, it's a fail, kind of thing. And it kind of made me like appreciate him because I could see how much he appreciates his craft,"*

Another challenge students frequently attributed their increased confidence to was the amount of oral presentations they were required to do. This gave students another chance to improve themselves and also learn to value their own abilities.

*IE25: "... think it's also just being inspired by the people around you and the lecturers and good feedback. I mean the criticism sometimes, like for example, Anli. We had that presentation and she was like no notes, I don't want to see notes from you anymore. But I mean that made us so much better actually. So you know, sometimes you get knocked down a little bit, but it's for the better. So, you know, just taking a little bit of inspiration from here and there."*

The annual Vega Brand Challenge was also mentioned as being the challenge that required the most perseverance and delivered the biggest learnings. The aspects of Brand Challenge that students found particularly difficult was working in groups with people they had not previously known, the tight deadlines and rejection of first attempts.

*IE25: "Well I feel like it's quite a vigorous degree and, you know, we have Brand Challenge – a little taste of what is to come. We have short deadlines. You know, I just feel like we are more industry ready because, especially because of Brand Challenge. I mean we got shut down every single one of our presentations. You go in and you're like yay, we're so cool like. And we got shut down. So, you know, it really puts you, you know, in your place. And you're like okay hang on, you know, like I have to rethink this because I might think it's a good idea, but they don't. So basically, yes, just ready for this other world."*

The fulfilment and realisation of a new economy is likely to be the biggest challenge humanity will face in this century. If more people can have the attitude of the student below – one of perseverance rather than whining and waiting for others to solve the problem – we will be in a much better position to make it a reality:

*IE23: "Thinking out of the box and being creative and thinking differently and you want to be different and you don't want to be the same as something, but you want to make it work. So, that's what's hard. You have to like think and if your ideas get rejected, you can't cry. You have to take it as part of the thing and you go back and you think."*

#### **4.8 Theme 8: Relationship with lecturers**

Despite the fact that lecturers give the students the most push back on ideas, as described in Theme 7, the students described a very positive relationship with their lecturers.

*IE5: "And then one of my lecturers, Roela – she was a copywriter. Yes, loved her. We never got along, but she was amazing."*



The lecturers are described as being *“completely genuine. They go over and above what they're expected to and that's the beautiful part”* (IE2).

Students often referred to specific lecturers who had impacted them either through insight into a particular subject; mentoring of a student with respect to career advice; emotional support through personal challenges; enthusiasm for a subject or because they used to swear a lot. Believe it or not, this was not necessarily a bad thing – one student interpreted this as being a reflection of the lecturer not conforming to what society expected of them and was inspired by this. The students would indicate regret when a lecturer whom they had been fond of left the institution.

According to students, *“lecturers are very like conscious to like not like put someone at a like disadvantage or objectifying one”* (IE10). During consultations lecturers will question students if they believe the student has taken an approach that is objectifying someone and will show students how it is not right.

Vega lecturers also appear to encourage students to be more authentic as they are secure enough in themselves *“to be crazy”* and this teaches students that *“crazy is okay”* (IE24). Crazy, in the way the student was referring to it, was about unleashing one's inner creativity and not being limited by socially perceived restrictions.

#### **4.9 Theme 9: Smaller classes**

An enabling factor of many of the other aspects described under Research Question two is the fact that Vega has less students and the class sizes are more limited than at many other tertiary institutions.

##### **Subtheme 9.1: Increased confidence to pursue opportunities**

A student described how being a recognised individual at Vega has pushed her to go and seek internship opportunities at a multinational corporation like Nestle whereas if she had been able to hide in a big institution, she may still be a quiet person who had taken the easy way out and *“speak to your cousin in the Department of Education or something.”*

Another student, who had previously been at Stellenbosch University, attributes her leadership roles and participation in the Student Representative Council at Vega to the fact that at Vega she is not just *“known by a student number... I'm known by my name”* (IE7). She has been more confident to explore herself and her abilities in a more intimate setting as it is less daunting than standing out in a huge crowd.

### **Subtheme 9.2: Increased engagement with peers**

A smaller environment allows more opportunity to encounter diversity directly. A larger educational institute is likely to have more people who are the same and students would therefore have more choice to remain in a less diverse friendship circle.

*IE23: "It's everything that I wanted to do, it's offering me everything and it was a small environment... the fact that it was smaller than Wits and I wanted to break away from the Jewish bubble, so I wanted to mix more and also, I think I wanted more personal and one on one versus just being known as a number."*

A more formal, structured way of increasing engagement between students, which a smaller environment also allows for, is the Vega Brand Challenge where students from different years across a number of degrees are placed into agencies to work on real client briefs for five weeks. The below statement was made by a male student discussing his most recent Brand Challenge experience. He almost demonstrates surprise at the fun he had working with a group comprising only female students.

*IE11: "I think Brand Challenge last year was a good one. I worked with a... My whole group was girls. But it was really fun."*

### **Subtheme 9.3: Opportunity to engage more with lecturers**

Smaller classes also allow for more intimate relationships with lecturers. The lecturers are then better able to identify and assist students who are struggling or "call out" a student who may be trying to get away with the bare minimum. This translates into a sense that lecturers actually care for their students and are their students' "friends". I believe that if one feels cared about and worthy of attention, this can contribute to the students' journey of self-discovery that was shared earlier where they start to realise their own value.

## **4.10 Theme 10: Delivering aha! moments**

*IE8: "I've always believed the biggest way we can make a difference is to make other people aware. People always just brush it off as, oh we can create awareness, but the perspective we've gained from Critical Studies, opening up our eyes so the things that we see that other people don't. That perspective is worth so much that we didn't notice before. To the people who aren't noticing it now. To actually try and make a difference."*

### Subtheme 10.1: Nature of the content

I have borrowed the popularised Oprah Winfrey term “aha! moment” for this theme related to research question two. In the dictionary by Merrium-Webster, this is defined as “a moment of sudden realization, inspiration, insight, recognition, or comprehension.” In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Eckhart Tolle describes what I would like to convey by an aha! moment: “the real truths of life are never entirely new to you or to anybody, but that moment when you recognize and resonate with them is that aha! Moment”(Tolle, 2012).

Students described several aha! moments experienced at Vega and how surprised they were to encounter these truths that have been in front of them the whole time, yet were invisible.

*IE14: “And this year has been the environment. But last year was, we’ve always known about the environmental impacts. Yes, last year was literally some of the stuff we’d never heard of before. And yet this was about a society we’ve been living in.”*

Another student describes how, as a result of their environmental module of Critical Studies, she could “*actually see so many problems and how people like abuse the environment. Even like abuse their power in a sense.*”(IE10)

The two courses students most referred to with respect to this theme was Critical Studies and Creative Development. The students often discussed these two subjects together as though they were connected and had a synergistic effect.

*IE19: “C Dev [Creative Development] does give you the more crafty part where you can fool around and break things apart and put them together to come up with a better outcome and with Critical Studies the whole manner of whereas we might be taught to think in a certain way and get through certain things in a normal manner, the use of Critical Studies, I had thought we were going to be looking at media the whole time and to get to now be taught about the environmental side of things and dig deeper into things, and it doesn’t keep you in such a narrow way of thinking.”*

*IE2: “One module in particular – Creative Development. There’s a lot of people that cry about this module, but I’ve seen the benefits of it because it’s an entire process of getting to know yourself and, kind of, interrogating yourself about who you are. And that’s what I liked the most about it. That and Critical Studies. For me, I believe those two match very well together because it’s a journey it takes you through where you explore the world, but then you explore yourself in the process.”*

*IE22: “... they lectured a course called Creative Development at Vega which ended up being my favourite module because it allowed students to explore what they were passionate about, within the framework of academia. I also enjoyed Critical Studies, a module that gave me the skills to critically*

*engage with work and ideas in a way that was very nuanced and critical – this has built a solid foundation and the principles learnt still influence my thinking today in the working world.”*

### **Subtheme 10.2: Systemic approach**

Another way in which the content makes students go “aha” is when they see connections across subjects that they had not been aware were there. Vega’s degrees are delivered as a “package”, i.e. students do not choose subjects themselves, which allows Vega to better ensure that courses can speak into each other.

*IE16: “That, for me, is the biggest thing, because interrelatedness was very important. If I had to contrast that to my experience at Rhodes, where you didn’t have prerequisite subjects, you picked your subjects, that for me was the biggest difficulty because pairing something that you’re passionate about with something that’s like a filler course, there’s no real interlinked activity. There’s nothing that you can really say oh, I see where this connects, whereas here, every subject interlinks and it builds your experience.”*

Also, when students recognise how elements in the system in which they live are connected they have an aha! moment.

*IE4: “So I never really had understood that until I got here where we were doing things like Critical Studies and things like Marketing that show you that, you know, people all connect and do different things because of different reasons. With brand strat it’s actually the same thing, so not only using your strat to think in a specific way just to get that end product, you can use brand strat in your daily life in the manner of how you do things, but just applying it differently.”*

Vega students reflected how the healthy brand model was carried through across all subjects from first year to third year, and students had to take it into account when working on projects.

*IE17: “And also, I mean, I think the fact that Vega, sort of, tries to instil those seven healthy brand points from first year, every brief that I’ve gone into, every project that I’ve done, I’ve, sort of, held that in the back of my mind.”*

*IE1: “I mean with everything that we’ve learnt: brand strat, channel planning, anything, it’s always been: make a healthy brand. From first year to third year we were still sticking to the healthy brand.”*

One student used the example of the Hippo Roller – an innovation developed by a social enterprise that allows people who do not have access to water to pull it in a container instead of carrying the heavy load on their heads. This makes more water and time available for education, household tasks and food production by enabling people to transport up to five times more water to their homes and food gardens (Water Innovation, n.d.). The student had been shown this example in the Principles of

Innovation course and seeing how the skill of innovating can be used to change people's lives really inspired her "to do amazing things like that one day" (IE26).

Students also demonstrated an extent of system thinking where they began to consider how they are part of a bigger system and how their actions have the potential to have helpful or harmful effects on this system.

*IE10: "And actually realising that like we have, we are going to make an impact because whatever we put out there everyone's going to see and it's making us more consciously aware that like we need to make sure that whatever we're doing has like a value to it and is doing some good."*

When asked how they believed organisations could start operating in a more sustainable way, students identified that the people who work within the organisations are so removed from the negative effects their company may be having and that, in order for organisations to change, the individuals within need to be made conscious of their contributing role.

*IE14: "For example, if I worked for Adidas or Nike and there was a brief and I was told that fifty per cent of whatever happens then is my responsibility. So I'm given the responsibility of if it fails, I'm given the responsibility of overseeing an entire process. Because what happens now the brand's operating a marketing department, you have that which I think there should never be. I think you take, like a baby, take whatever project you've been given and oversee it. And I believe by doing so I think we should change how we do business from the... I think fundamentally I think it should be changed, I think the type of... I think capitalism comes from a very negative way of doing business. I think people are given the opportunity to engage and oversee the effects of what they do on the environment."*

The result of these aha! moments is that the student has a different outlook on life, a new perspective is incorporated in their worldview and they move forward differently.

### **Subtheme 10.3: Making it real**

Students thirst for knowledge that they can see actually happening in the "real world". Students describe how real examples and case studies are very helpful for them to learn and believe the theory they are being taught.

*IE23: "Well, like case studies are very good for learning, like you learn a lot from them and they show the important facts and they stay with you. So, like whenever we do a case study on Coca-Cola or FedEx, or whatever they do, like you'll always remember it because it's... like they do it in such a way that it actually educates you. So, I feel like that would be a good educating way to change people's minds."*

IE3: *"Like I really love how Michelle always like looks, gives us all our examples, which are all like sustainable brands and stuff."*

One particular student discusses the complex that he has always had as a black person. This complex is that *"most white people, if not all, are racist. Most white people are advantaged and are in better positions"*. He describes how, for him to be able to change this mindset, he needs to see *"evidence"* to the contrary – he needs new facts in order to change the theory that he holds in his mind. *"So I think the moment, partly understanding like the moment I, like we understand that not all white people are racists and not all white people are privileged and all that, that's when the mindset can change"* (IE4).

This is one of the areas where students feel that they would like the Vega healthy brand theory to be stronger. They want to see it existing outside of theory in order for them to believe it and know how to actually implement it as a behaviour, rather than just a value framework themselves. This refers to learning about more examples of healthy brands.

IE1: *"It [Vega healthy brand] kind of gave us the guidelines saying this is what you should be doing, but it's not necessarily how you should be doing it."*

IE9: *"And I think another thing for that is that they never really made it, kind of, how do I put this into words? They never made it real. So it wasn't about like taking a brand and saying right this is a healthy brand and then showing you exactly how and why. It was always just about, oh no, this is the values that they need to have and blah blah."*

IE12: *"Like because it also goes to the whole Vega healthy brand thing. Like I want to believe that brands are more than money-making logos, you know what I mean? Because I want to, because I said, for example, like I want to make the world a better place. I'm going to... Wow, I need to actually think of more healthy brands. Like, for example, I don't think I'd ever work for such a big corporate like Coke."*

Students often spontaneously used the word *"drilled"* when referring to the healthy brand theory and described how they *"all knew it because you're kind of forced to after three years of hearing it over and over again."*(IE2).

IE6: *"The way it was taught to us was almost dreading. Because it was: it's so important, you need to know this off by heart. That was basically... It wasn't introduced to us in a way that we are excited about to talk about."*

#### 4.11 Theme 11: Engagement with diversity

Direct engagement with diversity – “the other” – was very much an important part of their educational experience at Vega that students valued. Students recognise that as one moves from high school to university one is likely to encounter a wider range of people, but they believe that something about Vega seems to attract “*particularly different*” types of people. Making “*friends who are from different walks of life*” has contributed to the richness of their learning experience.

Students were quick to reassure me that although Vega is a private institute this did not necessarily mean only a wealthy bracket of students attend it. A number of the students I interviewed were from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and were at Vega on a bursary or because they had received some form of financial assistance.

The engagement with diversity happens in informal settings, when you “*sit in the quad you literally sit next to someone, you ask them what they're studying and then you engage in a conversation*”(IE15).

Apart from these social interactions, students refer to the extent of group work that is required of them at Vega. Brand Challenge, a five-week project where students are placed in groups across degrees and years, was very often referred to as having a significant impact on demonstrating to students the value of diverse perspectives. Students describe a love/hate relationship with these forced interactions that take them out of their comfort zone, but overall they describe themselves as being more receptive, confident and capable as a result.

*IE7: “I think Brand Challenge last year. We had a very close group. At the beginning, we were all very quiet and shy and we weren't very open with one another and then we did this activity where we sat in a room and it was confidential completely with what we said and we just spoke about like why we are the way that we are. So like what makes us feel insecure or something that we're not very happy with. And then from that I feel like I've come out as an individual because it's taught me not to be scared of what others think and rather just to, you know, be happy with who you are as an individual. So that was, you know, quite an intense moment for me.”*

#### 4.12 Theme 12: Institute examples

Vega's values are not so much referred to directly by students as they are inferred by what students experience as being important to Vega.

That Vega values creativity, “craziness” and authenticity is communicated to students by the physical design of the campus. The slide from the first floor to the ground floor and the colourful walls imply that Vega is different, is other to “*places like Wits*” and that it is desirable to own one's own uniqueness. A student describes how this creative space allows one to “*just explore and just be*”.

*IE24: "I think I would be less creative and crazy because Vega teaches you, well you can see from the lecturers, Vega teaches you how to be crazy and they teach you that crazy is okay. So if you have the most insane idea like putting a slide at the university, it's okay, but if you go to places like Wits, for example, and I went there, all of their creatives look like lawyers."*

*IE6: "I've never been to Wits. But just from my perspective and my like understanding of what my friends have done and everything. Like they go to lectures, they don't. It's 300 people in a class. They sit at the back on their phones. Like here we're sitting in an environment where there's colourful walls."*

On the whole students describe a consistent experience of this creativity from the nature of the lecturers who are employed to the type of projects they're required to do – particularly Creative Development.

*IE24: "And Annette [lecturer] tells you, like, if you're doing something that doesn't scare you then there's no point in doing it. So try and do at least one thing every single year that gives you that rush of scaredness of butterflies in your stomach because that lights your creativity up."*

It seems that Vega is blind to the superficial aspects that are often used to divide and separate society – race, class, etc. Students therefore learn that other parts of their identity are of more value.

*IE24: "... they treat us all the same, they give us all the same time, they actually support friendships that are interracial and relationships that are interracial because the lecturers at Vega, just like us, don't see colour, they don't see creed, they just see people."*

The converse, however, is also true where Vega appears not to value something or gives conflicting messages about what it values, the students pick up on the cues and this almost gives them tacit approval to be likewise.

For example, the student quoted below picks up that ethical and fair behaviour are important values to Vega because they encounter them in the course content and projects. They interpret this as meaning that Vega expects them to aim for this kind of behaviour.

*IE4: "... being committed to like ethical and fair behaviour, I think that's in, I mean, you learn it there. It's inclusive like in certain modules you see it. You see it in certain activities that they make us do. Things like Brand Challenge, for example, where, you know, they try and encourage as much as people working together and we are all on the same level and we're all, you know..."*



IE24: *"And that's all, that's a huge value, you know, basically life instilled on me that basically changed from where I came at."*

IV: *"And does Vega support that value or...?"*

IE24: *"Vega definitely supports that value So Vega supports that value because they treat us all the same, they give us all the same time, they actually support friendships that are interracial and relationships that are interracial because the lecturers at Vega, just like us, don't see colour, they don't see creed, they just see people."*

Another student is very clear that the objectives of Vega are to encourage students to build brands for sustainability.

IE23: *"It's hard but I feel like that's the minds they want their students to leave with, like being ethical and encouraging others and thinking outside the box and making us sustainable. I think sustainability is a huge thing that's come out of it, like just being able to maintain it in a positive manner."*

However, more often than not students were quick to use Vega's apparent failings as a healthy brand as a justification/reason for their doubt in the possibility of healthy brand.

Vega was the brand against which the students most held the healthy brand principles as it's Vega *"that is trying to instil processes and strategy that basically are honest and are good and are responsible"*(IE24). Students describe how the best way to make healthy brand come alive for them is *"by setting an example, so by being a healthy brand, by not being profit driven and focusing on what the students want"*(IE15).

IE1: *"So when they're teaching something about that, but not really sticking to it, you kind of like don't know what, where to put yourself or what to believe. And like, you need to be transparent and you need to do this and add value to people's lives, but it's been hard to stick to that because Vega hasn't necessarily stuck to that themselves."*

IE19: *"I think that's the whole thing we've had that's been a downfall with Vega is to fine, you guys want us to be healthy brands, but are they healthy? Yes, so fifty-fifty."*

There are two main areas where students felt that Vega was not setting an example as a healthy brand. The first one was predominantly to do with operational/ administrative issues where students felt that they had experienced poor communication from Vega and their concerns had being ignored. The second is based on their belief that Vega is a business and all businesses are first and foremost profit (not purpose) driven. So although Vega presents a certain image – one student described the *"Google like vibes"* of Vega – students sometimes feel disappointed with the reality.

It is this second belief that Vega could not possibly be about anything other than profit that is primarily of interest to me, as a new economy challenges this belief.

*IE15: "I just think Vega's also a business at the end of the day, so it also generates some profits, so they'll do anything to look good, you know, and to sell people this idea, you know, being all human centred and things like that."*

Students were quite sympathetic to Vega's plight though – they agreed that the healthy brand criteria of profit being a consequence rather than a driver was a lovely sentiment, but just not possible.

*IE2: "I understand that initially the idea of Vega, the idea coming from Gordon [one of the Vega founders] straight from his mind to making it a real thing was very, was a great idea. Beautifully done and unfortunately it became then taken over by a corporate governance. So profit still needs to be made. There's a business, it's a financial company that runs the school, so we need to understand it from that perspective as well. There are limitations and all of those that come with it. So, we cannot, the school itself cannot holistically live up to everything that they've put out there."*

#### **4.13 Theme 13: External influences**

Although my focus in this study was primarily on the aspects of the Vega educational experience that encouraged or discouraged students to have a new economy worldview, it would be remiss not to discuss where students indicated external influences that had shaped their mindsets.

In this section I will discuss the two most prominent subthemes.

##### **Subtheme 13.1: The power of personal experience**

###### **Work experience**

The large majority of the students that I spoke to had had some work experience. All Vega final-year students are required to do a practical internship before they can graduate so all of them will have had some experience of work before they commit to an employer. This personal experience of the real working world was used as a testing ground for the theory that they have learnt at Vega, including theory, skills gained through group work and what they have learnt about themselves.

In some instances, the students describe how what they have learnt at Vega is very much at play in the "real world". For example, one student who interned at a media planning company throughout her degree refers to how she experienced that working in groups/teams is absolutely essential – in this way Vega has prepared her well.

Quite a few students learnt through their work experience how important it is to do work that fulfils you and that you enjoy. One student went from being a first-year student whose only aim was to secure a career where he earned “tons” of money to a third-year student who wants to do something he enjoys, even if he gets absolutely nothing. He credits this change of heart to what he has learnt about himself through Vega and the work experience he has done over the years.

*IE11: “I’ve learnt a lot more about myself. I’ve... In the beginning, I just wanted a job that paid tons and tons each month, and now I’ve realised that I’d rather do something that I enjoy, even if I get paid like absolutely nothing. I’m sure it will change when expenses kick in completely, but that’s the kind...”*

*IV: “And what’s kind of led to that change?”*

*IE11: “I did a few internships over the years and did a bit of side work building websites and that kind of stuff, and I realised it’s not worth all the like, not heartache, but the like arguing and stuff with clients and stuff just to get paid. And if you don’t really enjoy it, there’s no point in doing it.”*

*IE3: “So, and wherever that takes me, I don’t want to do something that like, when I’m interning now, I hate the whole eight to five because I actually hate going and I never want to be in that position ever.”*

Other students describe how some of the theory they have been taught is very difficult to implement in practice where who is right and who is wrong may depend on whose perspective you are adopting. In this way, work experience extends the students’ ability to see beyond the black and white of theory to more nuanced shades of grey.

*IE4: “But I just think maybe like on large-scale business is very hard to be compassionate. Look I see my boss, the reason why I said that is because... I see Alex, that guy has, to be honest, he’s gone out of his way for his employees. And sometimes he’s been disappointed, but then the thing is that there’s... I’ve also learnt that there’s a fine difference between, as a boss right, how much you think you’re meant to get from your employees and from an employee’s perspective, how much they feel that they’re giving.”*

Lastly, one student rejected the notion of healthy brands because his internship experience made him believe that those values are utopian – ideals that cannot be upheld in the “real world”.

*IE14: “Earlier this year I was offered an internship at an agency and how it worked was contradictory to what they taught here about money... It didn’t shock me, I wasn’t living in the utopia, you know, it happens like this in the real world. And like he just wants some money, I’m like okay. Yes, so there’s a big difference between ideology and application.”*

## **Life experience**

Many of the students explained their future goals as arising out of certain life experiences.

One student's long-term goal is to start a foundation that supports underprivileged students who want to study creative degrees. This student, herself a bursary beneficiary, describes how she *"grew up in a place called Chatsworth in Durban and you basically hustle. You basically hustle and the opportunities that were given to me weren't given to a lot of other people back there"*. This student remembers feeling distressed because a friend of hers who was a brilliant scholar was not going to continue with further studies because he could not afford it and also had *"no ambition to get a bursary"*. She also received little support from her parents as *"you either needed to be a doctor or a lawyer or an accountant, and there's, like, no room for creativity in people's minds as such"*(IE24).

When a young child was killed in a freak accident, another student saw the benefit of living in a community which is reactive to its members' needs as the community came together and *"started like a blanket drive in his name and like they raised like so much money"*. As a result she has realised that *"we need to like do something small to actually like make those impacts"* (IE10).

There were many other examples of events outside of an "official" learning environment that had influenced and shaped the students' beliefs and aspirations.

### **Subtheme 13.2: Role models**

Students often use referent others to illustrate certain goals of theirs. As described earlier, parents, particularly mothers, were important when it came to instilling certain values in their children. Parents are also used by students as role models for the kind of life they would like to have or the kind of life they do *not* want to have.

*IE1: "I've seen it firsthand in companies where like, even like with my Dad. He loves what he does, he absolutely loves it, but he also loves it because he's making money and he can support my family. So, he loves what he does, he's got a crazy passion for it, but at the same time he loves that he can support us."*

*IE8: "The whole reason... I've always said to myself looking at my parents, hating their jobs every day, I've always said, I won't be in that position. And I've understood why they've put themselves in that position, but I've never wanted to..."*

### **Chapter summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how the values of final year business students reflected those of new economy thinking and how their educational experiences were instrumental in shaping these values. Vega School was used as the site for the case and a total of twenty-one face-to-face interviews were conducted with current students and two Vega alumni

responded to email questionnaires. The interviews were transcribed and Nvivo 11.4.1 for Mac was used during the data analysis process to identify emerging themes. The research questions were used to organise the findings and present them for review. The next two chapters conclude the study with a discussion of the findings followed by implications and recommendations for future research and practice.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the implications of the research findings in light of the literature review.

The objectives of this study were two-fold:

Research question one: to understand how final-year business students reflect the new economy-esque values which a HEI professes to promote. Furthermore, to engage with the students on their personal position with respect to a new economy.

Research question two: to understand what aspects of the students' higher-education experience were influential in encouraging or discouraging a new economy mindset.

To begin the discussion I will recall what a new economy mindset is and then I will go through each of the findings for research question one and look at research question two in relation to this.

*“Students must learn how to discard old ideas, how and when to replace them... how to learn, unlearn and relearn”* – Alvin Toffler cited by Kate Raworth in her book *Doughnut Economics* (2017).

In the literature review I described how today's DSP has been very much influenced by flawed economic theories and how the resulting human behaviour is being blamed for many of the problems the world is facing today – from climate change to unacceptable levels of social inequality. Dunlap (2008) refers to Pirages & Ehrlich (1974) who suggest that *“the persistence of any society is threatened when its DSP no longer offers valid guidance for survival... Today industrial society is threatened, not by external enemies, but by the uncritical acceptance of an outmoded DSP that cannot be sustained in the environment of the future”*.

Business management students whose degrees are formed around the key concepts of neoclassical economic theory are likely to find it the most challenging to question foundations of this DSP as they have become so entrenched in their worldviews. For example, it may be very difficult for a business student to imagine a state where everything does not play a secondary role to profitability or shareholder value and other stakeholders only feature in the background (Jim Wu et al., 2010; Adomßent et al., 2014). This concern led Gioia (2002) to say the following:

*“Undoubtedly, we are training and turning out a very skilled group of people from our programs. But we shouldn't be surprised if some cynical observers conclude that we are also turning out some very skilled criminals—armed and dangerous criminals equipped with an array of powerful financial weapons, who leave a lot of gravely wounded lying in their wake because they are bereft of socially responsible values.”*

As this quote is considered, I think about the student in the study who commented that *“marketers are the most dangerous people in the world because they have perfected how to sell ice to Eskimos”*. In this case the weapons are the ability to craft persuasive messages and design aspirational imagery – they can equally be used for good as for bad without a socially and environmentally responsible mindset.

In the literature review I contrasted the beliefs and values of the existing economic system to those that a new economy would be built on. This comparison was based on the many varying, yet overlapping, statements that portray a vision of what a citizen of a new economy would value. The Solidarity Economy eloquently summarises what such a vision might look like:

*“Instead of enforcing a culture of cut-throat competition, they build cultures and communities of cooperation. Rather than isolating us from one another, they foster relationships of mutual support and solidarity. In place of centralized structures of control, they move us towards shared responsibility and democratic decision-making. Instead of imposing a single global monoculture, they strengthen the diversity of local cultures and environments. Instead of prioritizing profit over all else, they encourage a commitment to shared humanity best expressed in social, economic, and environmental justice”* (SolidarityNYC, n.d.).

For this research I chose to study the students of an HEI whose espoused values tend towards new economy thinking and do challenge some of the key assumptions of “Economics 101”. In particular, Vega claims to produce a “Generation V” of graduates that believe:

- *that the only meaningful social, cultural and economic exchange is that which adds value to the lives of all people;*
- *that the only meaningful brands are those that live this purpose by taking total responsibility for every decision they make;*
- *in being conscientious and committed to social justice;*
- *in being enterprising, innovative and using their tech-savvy to be tech-smart by leveraging the power of technology to add value to society (Vega Brand code).*

In Vega’s healthy brand model, Vega describes that profit is a consequence of being a meaningful brand and is not a brand’s *raison d’être* (personal telephone interview with Dr Carla Enslin).

As I begin my discussion, I consider how Vega students reflected that they have changed as a result of their three-year degree at Vega – what beliefs and ideas they have “unlearned” and with what beliefs these have been replaced. The objective is to understand how Vega’s written values have indeed been adopted by the students as their own in such a way that their behaviour going forward will contribute to the realisation of a new economy.

Before going into detail on each of the findings, here is a brief overview of the main findings:

Research question one:

- Students claimed to have an increased consciousness about the institutions that humans have created over time and how these institutions are often used for one group to dominate over another, including the environment. Along with this increased consciousness, students described a sense of discomfort with these institutions and demonstrated a sense of responsibility not to be ruled by them and in some cases to stand up to them.
- Students referred to the journey of self-discovery they have been on at Vega – they have developed greatly in terms of understanding their strengths and interests, and have come to value their unique abilities.
- As students discussed their plans for the future, three themes emerged that they believed would lead to a happy life: an authentic life, a meaningful life and a creative life. These above motivations were discussed in a more aspirational sense as students dreamed aloud about what they wished their future to look like.
- As we started discussing the practicality of these – particularly the extent to which they believe they will create meaningful change in society and the extent to which they will be able to be authentic to the values they claim to hold dear – it became apparent that the students have certain beliefs which limit their agency of social change. These were that authenticity is to be traded-off in the real world and that the economic system in which they are entering into is too big for them to have any sway.
- To overcome the gap between their aspirations, and how they believe reality will roll out, these students adopt certain coping mechanisms – they have developed stories they tell themselves to minimise their distress.

Research question two:

- Vega students described a certain degree of freedom they experienced at Vega, particularly within project briefs that allowed them to explore issues that were relevant to them and this gave them a greater sense of purpose to develop meaningful, value-adding solutions.
- Students appreciated the curriculum and lecturers that challenged them to be the best they could be. Many of them described finding potential they never knew they had.
- The relationship between lecturers and students was described as being more intimate and informal than that of many “traditional” universities. Students valued authenticity and a certain level of “craziness” within their lecturers.
- Smaller classes and a smaller campus was something that allowed students to have deeper relationships with lecturers, more possibilities for engaging with different people and more confidence to stand out as an individual.
- Students had their “bubbles popped” by a curriculum that opened their eyes to societal institutions which had previously been invisible to them and yet governed their thinking and behaviour. The subjects Critical Studies and Creative Development were the most mentioned as facilitating this process. Other aspects of the curriculum that students found to deliver



these aha! moments was the interconnected structuring between courses of their degrees, as well as real-world examples.

- Informal social interaction and formal group work provided real-life experience of “the other” and the value a diversity of worldviews has to offer.
- Vega’s institutional values which embrace uniqueness, creativity and authenticity were very much felt and experienced by students, and this encouraged and shaped students’ own values. Conversely students felt that Vega was unable to uphold some of their written values such as not being driven by profit. This was due to certain experiences the students had had and it was therefore further evidence of the impossibility of businesses truly having a greater social purpose before profit.
- External influences that shaped students’ mindsets with regards to new economy thinking was work and personal life experience, as well as parental role models.

For each of the five themes in answer to research question one, I look at which aspects of their Vega experience contributed to their increased consciousness, self knowledge and motivations. Lastly, the beliefs that students still retain and which limit their ability to contribute to a new economy are reviewed. These are the beliefs and ideas that they have found difficult to “unlearn”. I try to understand why, despite the “new economy” values espoused in the Vega brand code, this has been the case.

## **5.2 Awakened consciousness and conscience**

In the literature review it was emphasised that a new consciousness, a new way of thinking, is needed for humankind to start developing solutions and taking actions that will halt and reverse the increasing social inequalities and environmental degradation that is being witnessed today.

Gidley (2007) quotes Laszlo (2006):

*“Without renewing our culture and consciousness we will be unable to transform today’s dominant civilization and overcome the problems generated by its shortsighted mechanistic and manipulative thinking... The conscious orientation of the next cultural mutation – the shift to a new civilization – depends on the evolution of our consciousness. This evolution has become a precondition of our collective survival.”*

This more advanced stage of consciousness may also be described as a “*disposition towards human rights, peace, active citizenship, participatory democracy, conservation, and ecological, social, and economic justice*” (Podger et al., 2010). It is a worldview that “*assumes interdependence and interconnection*”. This new consciousness should result in caring and acting in the interests of the entire ecosystem (Raworth, 2017).

To this end, Vega students do seem to describe how they have become more conscious as they are

very clear that since being at Vega their “thinking has changed”. They describe their new way of thinking as being broader, more aware, more critical and more empathetic to, and inclusive of, different perspectives. One of the concepts that impacted them was the idea of “othering”, which occurs when one automatically determines that someone else is fundamentally different to oneself (Disney, 2017) and this difference is problematised in that the “other” is generally seen as morally/intellectually inferior (Jensen, 2011). The students referred to particular examples of otherness that they had become more open to: race, gender and religion were the most commonly mentioned.

A new economy does not have space for “othering” and Laszlo (2014) includes the ability to “not other” as one of his ten points in a credo of an evolved consciousness:

*“The whole gamut of concepts and ideas that separates my identity, or the identity of any person or community, from the identity of other persons and communities are manifestations of this convenient but arbitrary convention. There are only gradients distinguishing individuals from each other and from their environment and no real divisions and boundaries. There are no “others” in the world: We are all living systems and we are all part of each other.”*

Although students did not always use this word exactly, the examples they used to describe how they have changed highlighted how they have reduced their tendency to “other”. Students were surprised to realise how they have been guilty of unknowingly “othering” in the past and are now more conscious of when this behaviour is playing out around them. Instead of trying to remain with “people like us”, students have come to appreciate the “different types” of people they have encountered at Vega and are aware that other perspectives carry as much weight and value as their own. Even more than this, a student described how now that she is aware of patriarchy she feels that she will be able to do something about it when she sees it. This is in line with what Paulo Freire (1970) believes are the outcomes of critical consciousness – it is not enough to simply recognise or understand forms of oppression; one must also commit to challenging them through actions (Rhoads, 2009).

This concept of critical consciousness supports the finding that students who are now aware of certain institutions are reflecting a sense of unease with the way in which these institutions are manifesting inequality and abuse of power in the environments around them, and, as a result, students feel a responsibility to do something about it.

Students linked this awakened consciousness most closely with two aspects of their experience at Vega:

### **1. Engagement with diversity**

The first was the engagement with diversity across race, religion, class, gender and age. Longerbeam (2010) refers to Allport who defined prejudice as an attitude (usually unfavourable) toward a group of people that is not based on actual experience. Vega students often referred to how they had come from a “bubble” where they had not previously had experience with other genders, religions or races, but since being at Vega they had come to realise that certain beliefs they had held about others were actually misconceptions.

According to Allport’s contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), which *“remains the primary theoretical framework in contemporary research studies on intergroup contact and diversity outcomes in colleges”* (Longerbeam, 2010), not just any interaction will result in people appreciating their differences, it depends instead on their contact meeting four conditions: 1) They have equal status, 2) the contact is meaningful, 3) the contact is institutionally supported and 4) they have common goals and values.

From the findings it appears this contact hypothesis has played out as the students describe the conditions of a positive environment in which diverse relationships can prosper. At an institutional level, students clearly describe an institution that recognises the equality of its students and the value of diverse relationships. They also refer to the amount of group work Vega requires of them where they have to learn to appreciate their differences as they work towards the common goal of completing the relevant project. A project like Brand Challenge, which takes place over a long time, also allows meaningful engagement to occur.

Linking this back to student preparedness for a new economy, research has shown that *“by facilitating student exposure to diversity in ways that encourage appreciation and respect for difference, higher education classrooms encourage the democratic citizenship skills that will enable students to be leaders and active participants in an increasingly complex and diverse society”* (Ross, 2014).

Along with learning to value and appreciate “the other”, students also claimed to have learnt how to collaborate better with people who have different views and backgrounds. Much of higher education stresses individual learning and competition, resulting in professionals who are ill prepared for cooperative efforts (Cortese, 2003). Rhoads (2009) describes the importance of collaboration if one is to implement significant social change – doing so on one’s own in this age of globalisation and complex network societies would be very difficult. It is also important that collaboration is not just about being able to work with a group who share similar views – the wicked problems a new economy

needs to overcome require the equitable incorporation of multiple views (Larson & Redman, 2011). Therefore, it follows that Ofei-Manu and Didham (2014) identify cooperative learning relationships, which refers to the inclusion of group learning, networking, collaboration, partnerships and collective knowledge generation as an important educational component of education for sustainable development.

Laszlo also addresses collaboration in his ten-point credo of an evolved consciousness (Laszlo, 2014):

*“Collaboration calls for empathy and solidarity, and ultimately for love. I do not and cannot love myself if I do not love you and others around me: We are part of the same whole and so are part of each other.”*

## **2. A curriculum that delivers aha! moments**

Three aspects of the curriculum were responsible for increasing student’s consciousness and stirring their conscience.

First of all the non-discipline related content delivered in Critical Studies was frequently mentioned as having had the most impact on students. They describe how this course covered content related to environmental issues; the role of media in society and gender-related topics, and it gave them *“the skills to critically engage with work and ideas in a way that was very nuanced and critical”* as quoted from one of the alumni.

Much of the literature on education for sustainable development emphasises the need to provide students with a less narrow understanding of disciplines, professions and jobs, and not only to focus on specific knowledge and skills employed in a given area (Buckler & Creech, 2014). This is due to the systemic nature of the problems the twenty-first century citizen will face in their professional and personal capacities.

Through this Critical Studies course, students were also able to be reflective and learn what assumptions and beliefs their own worldviews have been built on and how they have behaved as a result. According to Cebrian Bernat (2014), this can foster transformative learning among students. Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning describes it as a *“process through which adults critically reflect on assumptions underlying their frames of reference and resulting beliefs, values, and perspectives; engage in a reflective rational dialogue about those assumptions; and, as a result, transform their assumptions and frames of reference to make them more inclusive, open and better justified”* (Fisher-yoshida et al., 2009).

A criticism of transformative learning theory has been its de-emphasis of social action (Mezirow, 2006) and as was noted in the literature review, the ultimate objective of EFS is for students to make appropriate actions, this is something to take into account. However, Mezirow says that transformative learning theory also contends that adult education must be dedicated to affecting

social change, but its focus is on *“creating the essential foundation in insight and understanding essential for learning how to take effective social action in a democracy”* (Mezirow, 2006).

The students do seem to reflect a change in this “foundation” and it has led to different behaviour as students interact more equitably and take a more critical eye when it comes to the work they create for their projects.

The second way that students have an aha! moment is when they see the connections between courses across years of their degrees, and to what they are studying in class to what is happening outside of Vega. Universities have different approaches to including sustainability-related content in their curriculum – from bolt-on courses to integrating sustainability issues into all courses, with the latter being recommended by the majority of authors in this space (Cebrian Bernat, 2014). On the whole, students did describe a situation where different courses speak to each other and, from a new economy perspective, the healthy brand principles are integrated into different subjects and projects – it is not taught in a separate silo with no relevance to the rest of the degree.

Systemic thinking has been identified as a central competence in education for sustainability or twenty-first century education (Cebrian Bernat, 2014):

*“A systems perspective acknowledges that the world is increasingly connected and decisions made in one area affect others in a complex array of local to global, human-environment interactions and impacts. Progressing toward sustainability entails grappling with these dynamics in the face of multiple, potentially conflicting objectives, such as improving societal welfare, providing economic opportunities and restoring or protecting life-supporting ecosystems”* (Larson & Redman, 2011).

### **5.3 Self-discovery**

*“More important, perhaps, is the realization by educators, parents, employers, and students themselves, that they desire and need more from education than just knowledge – they want education to promote development of students’ identities: self-knowledge, values, goals, and orientation and skills for personal and social transformation that would help in coping with the rapid changes that characterise life in this century”* (Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

*“Going to college changes people. Regardless of their age or stage in life, people’s understanding of the world, themselves, and their sense of what is possible are affected by the experience of higher education. In these ways, higher education is a deeply formative experience for all those who undergo it”* (Colby et al., 2011).

A significant finding in the research was the extent to which students felt that their educational experience at Vega had taken them on a journey of self-discovery where they had gone from being “very confused” and “lost” to being “comfortable and self confident”.

Education and identity have long been recognised as being linked by scholars (Kaplan & Flum, 2012). As only a limited number of adolescents have achieved a firm sense of identity by the time they near the typical age of entering university (Garrin, 2013), this period of emerging adulthood is a time during which they are *“free to explore potential identity alternatives without having to assume permanent adult commitments”* (Schwartz, 2005). The book *Rethinking undergraduate business education: Liberal learning for the profession* (Colby et al., 2011) notes that university is equally as important for older students to question and redefine who they are. Kaplan and Flum (2012) therefore hold that *“in addition to focusing on generative knowledge and on participation in current communities of practice, education must focus on the adaptive formation of students’ identities – promoting students’ confidence, agency, and skills in questioning and revising current self-aspects and identifications.”* Petocz & Dixon (2011) concur by commenting that *“the traditional focus in university learning on epistemology – what a student comes to know – is not enough when considering the development of dispositions such as sustainability and ethics: the ontological dimension – who a student is and who they are becoming – is also needed”*.

Why is identity formation important? Adams and Marshall (1996) summarise the five most commonly documented functions of identity:

- (a) providing the structure for understanding who one is;*
- (b) providing meaning and direction through commitments, values and goals;*
- (c) providing a sense of personal control and free will;*
- (d) striving for consistency, coherence, and harmony between values, beliefs, and commitments;*
- (e) enabling the recognition of potential through a sense of future, possibilities, and alternative choices.*

The way that Vega students described their experience of self-discovery very much relates to the functions mentioned above in that they have recognised their potential: *“I can do what I want to do”* and *“I can be whatever I want”*. They are learning to decide what is important for them, not just because of what their parents taught them, and they have a greater sense of direction.

The identity literature broadly acknowledges that not all identities are created equal and there is a concept of a healthy/positive identity which is formed. Myers et al. (1991) describe how a positive self-identity is not easily attainable in our contemporary “culture of -isms” (racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism). According to these authors, this is a result of a suboptimal worldview under which all who adhere to it are oppressed. A consequence of an identity formed under a suboptimal worldview is a fragmented sense of self where adherents feel insecure because their self-worth is primarily based on external validation (education, income, looks, clothes). People achieve validation for what they have, not what they are. As these things only provide temporary fulfilment, one’s identity may be subject to constant flux, which does not provide the sense of security and harmony a solidly grounded sense of self requires. This suboptimal identity formation process means that one looks for others to

be “better than” and this causes the disharmony witnessed among people. In contrast, under an optimal conceptual system self-worth is assumed intrinsic in being. Another important aspect of this optimal system is that one recognises how self is connected to all life including ancestors, those yet unborn, nature and community, which facilitates the establishment of peace, joy, harmony and the well-being of the whole.

Another author provides a slightly different view as to why people may come to rely on external rewards as they pursue an authentic sense of self. Hamilton (2010) describes a consumption society where the free market ideology with all its values (the priority of economic growth, materialism, individualism, competition and monetary valuation) have penetrated areas of cultural and social life from which they were previously excluded. Markets have seized on the desire for authentic identity as a way of selling more goods and services. People consume these goods and services as a way of creating “proxy identities”. However, products and brands can never give real meaning to human lives and so consumers are in a permanent state of unfulfilled desire, but many people’s personal identities are now so closely tied to their consumption behaviour that asking them to change their consumption pattern is like some kind of “death”. Of course this type of consumption has many societal implications, such as waste and unhealthy comparison.

From the above it seems that an identity based on a suboptimal worldview and/or on consumption are reproducing and reinforcing the institutions the new economy seeks to change, i.e. individualism, separation of self from community and nature, and prioritisation of the material over the spiritual.

As described in the findings, the Vega students interviewed seem to, on the whole, have come to a point where they value who they are for what they can contribute. They also seem to have an awareness that the world operates under a “suboptimal” system when it comes to identity formation.

There seems to be agreement in the literature that a healthy sense of identity requires active exploration of one’s potentials, beliefs, values, social roles prior to forming a commitment to them (La Guardia, 2009). This should also take place in an accepting social context so that a “false-self” is not adopted to gain approval from others (La Guardia, 2009). According to Schwartz (2006), *“to form a truly complete sense of identity, one must search for and discover one’s intrinsic nature or ‘true self’ and select a set of goals, values, and beliefs that actualize that true self”*. Kaplan & Flum (2012) motivate for education that focusses on the adaptive form of students’ identities to help them in coping with the rapid changes that characterise life in this century. This requires *“promoting students confidence, agency, skill in questioning and revising current self-aspects”*.

In line with these sentiments there seem to be certain aspects of the Vega experience that support Vega students developing a positive identity for the twenty-first century.

- Free to find meaning: students described how it was common that within projects they had a certain amount of freedom to choose to focus on particular issues, brands or industries that interested them. This facilitated the students being able to actively explore their potential and

test their beliefs and values in a relatively safe environment. According to Chawla and Cushing (2007), *“children and youth need to take personal ownership of the issues that they work on, choosing personally significant goals and integrating action for the common good into their sense of identity”*.

- Lecturers who appeared to have intrinsic self-worth and could express themselves freely (swearing, eccentricity, passion for their profession) were important role models for students in demonstrating that “crazy is okay”, i.e. being your ‘true-self’ is okay. Students also commented on lecturers that consciously challenged the “suboptimal” worldview of a fragmented humanity and encouraged students to be aware of how their beliefs may have been formed under this. Thus, lecturers fostered an “accepting social context” in which students could be their true selves.
- Vega as an institution was also identified as encouraging. Therefore, students are allowed to explore their own unique identities without feeling that they need to conform to others’ expectations.
- Two aspects of the curriculum were important as students explored their identity: 1) course content that illuminated the suboptimal worldview allowed students to see how external forces may have driven them to have certain complexes as an oppressed person which had until then been part of their identity. An “oppressor” was also able to review their identity as a white male and yet now a feminist; 2) The course Creative Development in particular pushed students to learn more about themselves and their place in the world through the projects included in the syllabus.
- The challenges Vega students describe they experience also allowed them to test their potential and realise how they could flexibly apply themselves to solving different types of problems, i.e. a non-design student describes how she taught herself to do stop motion through YouTube because she needed to know for a project. As a result she feels more capable.

To sum this section up, Vega students describe how they have formed positive identities based more on intrinsic self-worth and a more optimal worldview. In theory this journey could be an important step in allowing them to become citizens with a new economy worldview as they will be less likely to perpetuate a divisive social and consumerist system as their identities are less reliant on comparing themselves to others.

## **5.4 Motivations**

More than anything, Vega students just want to be happy in life. Although money was seen as being instrumental in achieving this happiness, it was more the means to an end than the end in itself. The end that students are seeking is good relationships with others, career fulfilment, contentment with self and a relatively stress free existence, i.e. being able to meet their and their family’s needs. In striving for happiness, students hope to lead authentic, creative and meaningful lives.



In the new economy values listed in the literature review I borrowed the Swedish term “lagom”, which means “just the right amount”, and in the sense of a new economic model it refers to a better balance among built, human, social and natural assets (Constanza, 2015). Research has shown that having enough money rather than too much is in fact better for our well-being (Murray, 2011) although the value our society has placed on materialism makes this a difficult belief to accept.

Linked to the discussion on identity, it is important that students develop intrinsic self-worth rather than self-worth that is dependent on their ability to use consumer goods to define themselves.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity has been described as the experience of being true to oneself and “*at its core is an emphasis of knowing and freely accepting the self within the context of the social world*” (La Guardia, 2009). It is very much linked to the identity of the self, which was discussed above. Being authentic has been associated with greater overall feelings of self-worth and less reliance on external factors, such as appearance, for self-worth (La Guardia, 2009). While taking direction and action from one’s true self is energising, alienation from the true self leads to ill-being (La Guardia, 2009). Therefore, if students are able to lead authentic lives, they will have greater chance of achieving a state of well-being and greater personal and relational health. In this regard, Vega students spoke about how they wanted to follow careers that would fulfil them and would be aligned with their passions – in other words, careers and life roles that will allow them to be their true selves (from the clothes they wear to their natural hair). Research by Philippe, Vallerand & Lavigne (2009) found passion toward activities can contribute to one’s happiness and self-growth whereas mere activity engagement does not guarantee an increase in well-being. More than this, the authors of the book *Rethinking undergraduate business education: Liberal learning for the profession*, (Colby et al., 2011) refer to Howard Gardner’s research, which shows that creative solutions to problems are more likely to occur when people engage in an activity for the sheer enjoyment of it instead of being driven by external rewards. In this sense, students following career paths that authentically fulfil them is beneficial to their well-being, as well as fostering their ability to be better problem-solvers – both important for a new economy.

However, it was a minority of the students who described how they practically intended on trying to make this a reality, the majority of students’ immediate future plans involved getting a job where they could. As will be discussed in the section on Limiting Beliefs, there was a sense that authenticity could wait until later or the identity could be split into a work self and an authentic self, depending on the context.

### **Meaning**

*People can and do choose goals and values that promote higher purposes, such as purposes of creativity, morality, and spirituality* (Damon et al., 2017).

The word meaningful is used as a heading here as that is the word the students used, although their understanding of meaning was more in line with how Damon et al. (2017) define purpose: *“a stable and generalised intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self”*. An important part of this is that the purpose is beneficial to others – it is not just any reason given for the actions one takes (Yeager & Bundick, 2009).

According to Damon et al.(2017) and other prominent identity theorists, youth is a formative period for cultivating a sense of purpose. Having purpose may also play an important role in the formation of a solid identity (Damon et al., 2017). Having a sense of purpose provides an important motivation that leads to positive outcomes such as prosocial behaviour, moral commitment and high self-esteem. So again, from a new economy perspective, it seems that students having a sense of purpose will contribute to their increased well-being as well as motivating them to add to the well-being of others.

*“To the extent that people come to experience life as a self-referential affair of satisfying immediate needs, desires, and expectations, this dimension is coloured by expediency. In contrast, as much research has shown, to the extent to which people understand life as a bigger journey toward understanding, justice, and wisdom, this fuels lives of commitment, resilience, and positive agency”* (Podger et al. 2010).

Vega students recognised that leading a meaningful life where they make a positive difference in the lives of others will contribute to their sense of fulfilment and happiness. However, few of them described a practical action plan arising from this generic wish. Similarly, with their desire for an authentic life led by following their passions, there was a gap between the immediate steps they had to take after graduation and the point at which they would know they were being authentic or meaningful.

## **Creativity**

Many of the students claimed to have chosen their particular degree/intended career path because it allowed them to be creative. Students who had chosen one of the “less creative” degrees at Vega, because they felt that creativity was not natural for them, were surprised at what they were actually capable of. According to a Creative Development lecturer, it is in fact often the more traditional business-focussed students who excel in this course. Looking back, Vega students believe that Vega has increased their creative abilities and going forward they hope to apply this in their careers, whether or not they are directly employed in a typical creative job. Having the opportunity to be creative seemed to be something they felt would contribute towards their happiness.

There is, in fact, quite a lot of literature that would support the students in that goal as some research says that a creative individual is a more fulfilled one *“and one whose life is characterised by ‘agency’ – the capacity to take control and make something of it”* (Craft 2003).

Creativity has also been recognised in the EFS literature as being an important competency – either

directly or as integral to other competencies, such as systemic thinking and innovation. According to Sandri (2017) and Lozano (2014) creativity may be a fundamental way of making the sustainability (or new economy) paradigm shift as when adopted by individuals, groups, organisations and society, creativity can help to challenge current unsustainable mental models. In a more explicit way, McWilliam (2007) describes university graduates as potential future “creatives” who will need to perform work that is *“less focused on routine problem-solving and more focused on creative outcomes that involve new social relationships, novel challenges and the synthesising of ‘big picture’ scenarios”*, skills which twenty-first century employers, and the wicked problems the world is facing, are in desperate need of.

As a result, developing creativity has become an important agenda for educators globally (Stables, 2009; Craft, 2003). Sandri (2017) and other authors (Craft, 2003; Jackson, 2011; Hamilton, 2010; Stables, 2009; O-Connor, 2013) however caution us to consider how well the “creativity agenda” in education does in fact support EFS’s primary goals. Creativity has been linked to the “disposable” culture *“where obsolescence is built in at the design stage of many consumer goods and where fashion dictates the need for constant change and updating”* (Craft, 2003). This type of innovation has led to very unsustainable practices, as well as fuelling people’s needs to define their identities through material goods.

In the theme Limiting Beliefs, students take for granted how the fierce competition between brands leads them to keep continually bringing out “bigger and better” versions of what are often essentially very similar products. Students, in fact, openly admired organisations that exemplify this type of unsustainable creativity.

Creativity can also be used in many different contexts. One of the students, rather tongue-in-cheek, describes how brands could apply their creativity in response to climate change in order to continue to remain profitable.

*IE8: “You’ll have corporates like all of a sudden, they’ll start to dish out earthquake packs and that sort of thing. So, instead of changing the way that they function it’s like here you go, now we can make money off you.”*

In the EFS literature, one finds recommendations on how universities may go about fostering creativity in their graduates – a student-centered approach is emphasised. However, there is little about how to develop this ability within a system that doesn’t necessarily celebrate creativity within a “profoundly humane” framework.

The links between students’ educational experience at Vega and their drive for happiness through an authentic, creative and meaningful life was less clear, although certain aspects did come through from the data analysis:

- This theme is difficult to separate from the theme of self-discovery as living an authentic, meaningful and creative life is very much dependent on one having uncovered/developed one's true self, which would enable one to live authentically and meaningfully. Therefore, I hypothesised that many of the educational experiences that support a positive identity formation in students would also be influential here:
- Vega lecturers who were perceived as being authentic: A question to ask would be how does Vega and its students engage in creativity within a new economy/healthy brand system? What pedagogical practices are intentionally being employed in this regard?
- The Vega healthy brand model that all students are aware of encourages students to create meaningful transparent brands. So although this was not explicitly stated, it is possible that this has influenced students thoughts about how they should live their lives. The word "should" is used intentionally due to its normative overtone. When the students described the process of how they had learnt these healthy brand principles, the term "drilled" was mentioned a couple of times. This meant that all the students spoken to were aware of the seven principles and had a grasp of the content of most of them and believed that, in essence, they were normatively "good". However, as becomes evident when looking at limiting beliefs, there is a difference between should and could.
- External influences were also important in influencing how students believe they may achieve well-being. According to Giacalone (2013) students often bring into class with them the "baggage of the dominant materialistic values responsible for a host of interpersonal and social problems". As was evident in this study, and is in agreement with other studies (Giacalone, 2013; Nga & Yeoh, 2015), parents are critical in modelling whether or not their children develop materialistic, self-centered values that would guide decisions they make to achieve happiness. Although students did not explicitly describe their parents as being materialistic, the students did use "econophobic" language (where "money is used to dictate and justify all actions, effectively drowning out the language of morality, generational responsibility, and virtually every other language not framed around fiscal concerns" (Giacalone, 2013)) in order to justify why many of them are doing the degrees that they are doing as opposed to something else that they are potentially more passionate about. Parents had a big role in influencing their children to make "economically sensible" career decisions. Fortunately, research has shown that the values students' arrive with in first year are not set in stone and Giacalone (2013) advises lecturers to pursue three goals when trying to free students of this "baggage": 1) teach students critical thinking skills; 2) leverage the opinions of students who do question a materialistic mindset; 3) demonstrate pedagogical expressions of warmth and empathy. The findings did indicate that, since starting at Vega three years previously, students have in general become more aware of the importance of securing meaningful, creatively fulfilling employment as a path to their well-being. As will be discussed under Limiting Beliefs though, there was a sense that the reality of money would limit their capacity in this regard.
- Work experience was another external influence in shaping students' beliefs and values. In

relation to this theme about pursuing well-being, certain students through their own work experience had to recognise the importance of being fulfilled by one's work and that a big salary will not necessarily be enough to lead to this fulfilment. On a more negative slant, other students came to believe that healthy brand principles are not feasible in the workplace as they had not seen any evidence of it. The workplace has in fact been recognised as an important site for learning that provides students with a legitimate context for understanding what it means to practice in a field (Mcrae, 2014). Part-time work has also been said to help adolescents and emerging adults acquire attitudes, values, habits and knowledge, and develop a social context (Niu & Wang, 2009). As a result, it can be used as a formal type of experiential learning. McRae (2014) describes that a key requirement for experiential learning to be transformative is intentional critical reflection. As the work experience Vega students gain during their university years is not part of their degree in a formal way, it is unlikely that this critical reflection occurs. This is potentially something for Vega to consider.

- Something that was not investigated in this study but may be of interest, is the effect of the “millennial generation” discourse on how students perceive their roles in life. Millennials are said to be “purpose driven” and desirous of making a positive difference in the world – this is a “fact” that has been communicated from academic literature to popular TED Talks. How much of this has become a self-fulfilling prophecy?

## 5.5 Limiting beliefs

*“Possessing the appropriate values and attitudes may help us want to act to intervene, but we will not unless we feel empowered to do so” (Murray, 2011).*

*“Let us start by looking at the role of beliefs in the creation and possible alleviation of our problems. Let me start with the opening lines from the teaching of the first cognitive psychologist of note, two and a half thousand years ago, the Buddha. ‘We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make our world’” (Walsh, 1992).*

The main purpose of this study was to understand how successful a particular HEI was in transferring its espoused new economy values to its graduates in way that would result in them intending to enact these values in their own careers and lives. Many of the findings pointed to graduates that had been given a foundation that would enable them to do so:

- the students reflected a new consciousness with regards to appreciating “the other” (people and planet), seeing how everything was interconnected and feeling a sense of responsibility to live differently as a result;
- the students reflected on their journey of self-discovery and how they had come to a place where they valued themselves and were comfortable in their identities and did not feel pressure to be who others expected of them; and
- the students wanted to be able to be true to their identities in their careers, following their

passions in creative and meaningful ways that would add value to society.

Thus, the learning outcomes of the Vega education has moved into the affective domain as opposed to just the cognitive domain. Vega has indeed been instrumental in changing the way that students think about the world around them, in particular through Critical Studies, which opened students' eyes to the invisible institutions that shape how people engage with each other and the planet; Creative Development, which involved students exploring their identities in a compassionate and positive way; the group work required for many projects, but Brand Challenge in particular; the relative freedom students have within project briefs to explore issues that interest them; the challenges they are presented with while completing their degree; the relationships with authentic and conscious lecturers; and the institutional values.

However, hope in these students becoming future new economy leaders and citizens started to diminish when it became apparent that very few of the students could concretely describe their authentic, passionate, meaningful future. There seemed to be a gap between the discomfort they felt at much of the social and environmental issues the world is facing and how they saw themselves being able to play a role in doing things differently. This is not to say that they do not recognise the issues, nor that they do not think they should be different; it just seemed that they could not imagine how.

In the findings, two beliefs were identified as being held by the students that seemed to limit their sense of agentic capability:

- Authenticity is traded-off in the real world
- The system is too big and I am small

In the book *Our Sustainable Selves*, Murray identifies beliefs as being fundamentally important in influencing what an individual says and does. As beliefs are not necessarily facts and can just be representations of our reality (Murray, 2011), it is possible that we accept certain self-limiting beliefs about the "*hopelessness of our situation, helplessness to change our situation or our personal worthlessness*". Self-limiting beliefs feed off our good intentions by seeking to justify why we should not act.

Each of these beliefs will be addressed in turn.

### **Authenticity is traded-off in the real world**

Despite the finding that students are seeking to represent their identities authentically in the world, they displayed doubt that the brands they would be working for were themselves authentic. So although they referred to learning course content that encouraged being 'transparent' (healthy brand principles) as being an important quality for a brand, students seemed quite cynical about this being realistic.

The students could quite easily give examples of successful brands that had been involved in some scandal that contradicted that brand's espoused values, i.e. Nike, Johnson & Johnson, yet continued to be financially successful. They could less easily give examples of "healthy brands" that were authentic. One student, however, described how seeing positive examples was instrumental in increasing her faith in the potential of applying healthy brand principles.

Looking at the literature, there are a couple of lessons that can be taken from this feedback from students:

According to Larson and Redman (2011), who expand on the four knowledge domains in relation to connecting environmental education with behaviour, declarative knowledge is the least effective in promoting pro-environmental behaviours. This seems to be evident with the Vega students where merely learning the content of the healthy brand principles is not enough for students to be empowered to live them out. Vega should therefore consider how to better address the three other knowledge domains: procedural, effectiveness and social knowledge. When I asked students what they felt they would need to be able to apply healthy brand thinking more ably, they said case studies: *"I think there could be a focus on actually taking students and putting them in situations or investigating case studies where it's very clear that this business is operating unethically, because that's the one thing I haven't really been exposed to"*(IE16). Larson and Redman (2011) recommend the use of real-world explorations which *"present authentic investigations of intersecting components while avoiding the over-simplifications found in hypothetical scenarios"* and as a result *"subject matter can be conveyed in a more connected, interdisciplinary manner that acknowledges complex system interactions"*.

### **The system is big and I am small**

*"The aim of environmental education is to make students capable of envisioning alternative ways of development and to be able to participate in acting according to these objectives* (Jensen & Schnack, 1997)

That "economics has changed from being a theory of our material subsistence to becoming a theory of human nature" (Anup, 2014) is very evident as students describe a sense of helplessness against the forces of greed and consumptive desire that defines human nature and, as a result, the business practices that come out of it.

Where Vega has been successful is facilitating a change in students' consciousness with respect to questioning their assumptions around other ways of being in terms of race, religion, gender and class. It seems as if Vega has been less so when it comes to students seeing people as anything other than the "Homo economicus" of neoclassical economic theory, which is solely concerned with their narrow self-interest.

In the areas of race, religion, gender, etc. it seemed that students had more of a sense of agency over the actions they could take to live differently, i.e. they could personally engage with others differently, and they had learnt how to consider different perspectives and incorporate them into their own worldviews. However, in the area of how people engage economically it was very difficult for them to imagine how they could be a positive social force in the businesses that destroy natural resources and seek profit before anything, etc.

The question is why the difference? On speaking to a Vega Economics lecturer about the nature of the course taught at Vega, it was described as being necessarily textbook-based to ensure standardisation across all campuses and the textbook used was reinforcing the prioritisation of mainstream commitment to economic growth and consumption. This may be something that needs to be reconsidered to ensure a greater plurality of economic thought. It would also need to be connected to the other more business-related subjects such as Brand Strategy, Channel Planning, Finance, etc.

According to Piasentin and Roberts (2017), a major drawback of some EFS is *“the generation of a sense of despair and helplessness in students by exposing them to all the severe and complex sustainability problems and not providing enough focus on the positive alternative – an attractive vision of what a sustainable life and society might look like and practical examples and tools of how to promote change.”* In their study, the course elements that students found to increase their optimism and confidence most were hearing from people with first-hand experiences, as well as acquiring knowledge of practical tools, examples and experiences. This mirrors what the students in this study were feeling. This is in line with other EFS/transformational education literature, which highlights the importance of real-world examples and active learning.

One aspect that does not appear to get as much emphasis in the EFS literature is the importance of collective action. According to Larson and Redman (2011), many environmental behaviours only have a significant impact in the aggregate, so although when students come to understand the importance of the larger system, *“it may actually create a barrier to change as individuals realise that their actions alone will not lead to substantive outcomes”*. According to these authors, the domain of effectiveness knowledge must *“clearly relay that change is made through individuals acting as a part of the collective, while building the social knowledge needed to advance sustainability”*. Jensen and Schnack (1997) reiterate this saying that environmental problems are structurally anchored in society and our ways of living. Therefore, it is necessary to find solutions to these problems through changes at both the societal and the individual level. Education for democracy may therefore provide some clues as to how to prepare students to be active participants



## 5.6 Coping mechanisms

Cognitive dissonance theory says that people generally like to see themselves as consistent, and prefer thoughts, feelings and behaviours to be in accordance with each other as inconsistency may be experienced as unpleasant (Harreveld et al., 2009). When speaking to Vega students it seemed that they experienced cognitive dissonance resulting from the fact that they believe certain business practices to be unsustainable, yet were under pressure to participate in such businesses because of the various factors discussed under Limiting Beliefs. Consequently, students demonstrated a variety of strategies to minimise the arising discomfort. One of the most prevalent seems to be that students put off committing to more “new economy” career and lifestyle decisions by saying that they will be able to do that in time once they have earned some money and have work experience. This non-commitment allows them to maintain an ambivalent attitude, which according to Harreveld et al. (2009) is no more stress than holding a univalent attitude so students can continue to hold onto two opposing behavioural beliefs.

In *The Sustainable Self: A Personal Approach to Sustainability Education*, the author says that the internal discomfort of cognitive dissonance is inevitable when one is not aware of one's core values and therefore unable to make conscious decisions to act in accordance with these values (Murray, 2011). Becoming consciously aware of our core values allows one to better cultivate and practice it. An important role of higher education for a new economy is therefore to help students elicit their core values and educate them on the potential harm that materialistic core values can cause (Giacalone, 2013).

## 5.7 Enabling factors

Certain aspects of Vega students' experience did not necessarily have a direct impact on the changes experienced by students. However, these factors facilitated and allowed it:

- The role of lecturers: studies have shown that instructor-student rapport (where rapport is conceptualised as feelings of “mutual trust and harmony” in a relationship) has been positively associated with student participation, classroom connectedness and learning outcomes (Kody Frey & Tatum, 2016). From the way that Vega students described their relationships with lecturers there is definitely a sense of rapport between them and the resulting trust allows students to be more open to hearing what lecturers have to say. So for example, where a lecturer may be challenging a student's closely held beliefs, the student may take this better from a lecturer with whom they have rapport. Owen (2014) looks at the difference transformational leaders/teachers make in teaching – with an emphasis on charisma in the context of an art school. A transformational leader/teacher would enhance the motivation, morale and performance of followers/students by redesigning perceptions and values, and by changing expectations and aspirations. Owen (2014) further describes the three components of transformational leadership in relation to a lecturer: charisma, which is “defined as a function of students' belief in a lecturer and their mission, and of their admiration

for, trust in, and devotion to that lecturer”; individualised consideration, which is where lecturers treat students differently according to individual needs and abilities; and intellectual stimulation, which is associated with lecturers who “stimulate extra effort among their students by forcing them to rethink ideas that they may have never questioned before”. The lecturers which stood out to students as having had the most impact on them reflected these transformational leadership qualities to a certain extent. The EFS literature also highlights the importance of the lecturer as being a “facilitator, collaborator, and fellow learner on the journey toward sustainability, student in tow” (Armstrong, 2011). The lecturer must practice what they preach, encouraging values development by example (Armstrong, 2011).

- Smaller class sizes: in the literature review, EFS literature was referenced that highlights the importance of more active, experiential pedagogies as opposed to one-way lecturing in order to facilitate the transformative learning that needs to occur for students to develop a more sustainable worldview. Other education literature has indicated that large classes make it challenging for lecturers to employ less didactic teaching styles, which is counterproductive to students being able to adopt critical thinking and problem-solving skills required by a new economy (Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Cotton et al., 2009; Exeter et al., 2010). Large classes also limit student-lecturer interaction and increase student anonymity (Exeter et al., 2010). Many of the things that students mentioned as being an important part of their educational experience (being known personally by lecturers, group work, hearing different perspectives from their peers) was helped by the fact that Vega classes are smaller.

## 5.8 Chapter summary

*“So what stands in the way of creating a conscientious, accountable and sustainable sort of capitalism – a system that in the long-term is actually habitable? It is, I think, a matrix of **deeply held beliefs** about what business is for, whose interests it serves and how it creates value.” (Hamel, 2010)*

The predominant words that students used to describe how they have changed as a result of their time at Vega is that they “think differently”: about the world around them, the “others” who inhabit it, themselves and their purpose. In so far as the students demonstrated behavioural change with respect to actively valuing diversity in group work and class discussions; and embracing new challenges because they have developed a greater sense of intrinsic self-worth, it appears as if transformative and affective learning has taken place. Students also demonstrated intention to behave differently in the future through being able to question “othering” when they saw it and through seeking to live an authentic, meaningful life. Revisiting how the beliefs of Vega students have shifted in relation to that of the new economy leader tabled in the Literature Review in Table 9, the below picture emerges.

*Table 11: Snapshot of new and old economy beliefs held by study participants*

<b>New economy beliefs held</b>	<b>Ambivalent beliefs</b>	<b>Unquestioned old economy beliefs</b>
Everything is connected	Material abundance does not equate to happiness, but it does help	Economic science is fact – law of nature
Freedom means growing and developing as unique, purposeful and conscious human beings in a rich network of caring relationships with other human beings	The purpose of business is profit maximisation, but it can achieve this through contributing positively to society	Humans are by nature self-interested and greedy
Diversity is something to be celebrated – my way is not the only way	Humanity should live in harmony with nature, but sometimes this just is not possible	Technogolgy permits us to be bigger and faster

In relation to others and themselves, Vega students recognise how, for too long, the world has imposed its own divisive and demeaning “rules” and the students appear to no longer want to accept this. However, in relation to the economy, the students still seem to be very much its subjects under its power. Why the difference? The findings indicate that being exposed to theory in class about patriarchy, racism, othering, etc. combined with the personal experiences with “others” provided by group work, social interactions, etc. where they can see for themselves how these social institutions have lied to them has increased their consciousness and given them a conscience that will guide their behaviour going forward. In contrast, students did not believe the theory that had been shared with them about “healthy brands”, and even this theory is not necessarily consistently delivered as is evidenced by the use of a standard economic textbook that says growth and profit maximisation is the be all and end all. Students also had very limited personal experience with a different way of “economic” being; work experience had taught them “business as usual” principles and in their opinion the educational institute itself was a profit-driven enterprise. Where some students had tried to affect change on campus, they had been met with little success and, as individuals, felt helpless.

In the final chapter, how Vega and other HEIs might leverage their influence and time with students better to graduate changemakers for a new economy is considered.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

*“While many of us may want a new economy where people and planet are prioritized over profit, we remain skeptical that another world is really possible” (Loh, 2017).*

Enthusiastic, driven, well-meaning and educated, the final-year students who participated in this study are anticipating what the future holds for them, particularly with respect to their careers. As this group begin to direct their energy into the brands they work for or those they go on to create, their efforts will be filtered through the worldview they have developed over twenty-one years or so of life experience and three or more years of studying. How might this particular group shape and influence the world in such a way to become the just, sustainable and compassionate place a new economy is seeking? Will they indeed be the responsible, value-adding, conscientious and social justice seeking individuals that their higher education provider professes to graduate?

The importance of higher education with respect to instilling in graduates the beliefs, values and skills to inspire and equip them to realise a new economy was described in the literature review. Referencing EFS literature, some of the educational approaches that have been shown in studies or hypothesised to be more effective at bringing about the needed worldview change of students was supplied. Among these, the pedagogies related to affective and transformative learning were highlighted, some of which HEIs find particularly challenging to implement.

In certain respects, it seems that the HEI explored in this study has been very successful at providing the environment in which students could develop a new consciousness more aligned with that of a new economy. The word environment is used intentionally as the literature and the findings in the study point to the “whole institute” approach required for this kind of mindset change to take place, i.e. everything from the textbooks to the aesthetics of the buildings can communicate a value lesson. Vega, while giving the students the theoretical vocabulary of “othering”, has also allowed students to experience for themselves the value of engaging with the “other” through its colourful walls, “crazy” lecturers and diverse student body. The students can imagine what they would be missing if Vega was a replica of every other institute with each student exactly the same. In a lecture, social activist, Naomi Klein (2016), said the following:

*“... there is no way to confront the climate crisis as a technocratic problem, in isolation. It must be seen in the context of austerity and privatisation, of colonialism and militarism, and of the various systems of othering needed to sustain them all... Overcoming these disconnections – strengthening the threads tying together our various issues and movements – is, I would argue, the most pressing task of anyone concerned with social and economic justice. It is the only way to build a counterpower sufficiently robust to win against the forces protecting the highly profitable but increasingly untenable status quo.”*

Given student's professed intentions to be on guard for evidence of "othering" in the future, this sounds like a good foundation for a cohort of students that could be torchbearers of a new economy. And this is often the word students used to describe their experience at Vega – it has given them a good foundation. And yet as important as students' awakening to "othering" is, students remained cynical about the possibility of an alternative economic system which is "distributive and regenerative by design"(Raworth 2017). Ironically, if students are not able to transform their worldviews with respect to the purpose of the economy (to serve people and the planet, not the other way around) and they do remain bound by the current system's framework, it will in fact be very difficult for them not to "other" as that's baked into this system.

This is not to say that the students are profit hungry, wannabe corporate ladder climbers; the findings reflected that they understand their wellbeing is not solely dependent on financial wealth but also on relationships, their ability to be their true-selves and contribute positively to the world. However, there was such a disconnect between this "ideal" view of what was sufficient for wellbeing and how they described the reality of the business world they were entering into. In this real world brands are so powerful that they can say one thing and do another and no one can do anything about it because we're all so reliant on this economic system not failing.

The big question I raise in this conclusion is why the difference: why could students transform their minds with respect to othering and not to a new economic ontology? Vega's marketed graduate attributes and values address both of these areas – from striving for social justice to social purpose (not profit) driven brands.

I believe the answer lies in the access that students have to experiences and evidence of "other ways of being". While discrimination does indeed occur at unacceptable levels around the world and in South Africa, society is becoming more unforgiving of those individuals and institutions that perpetuate it. So although this was not explicitly said by students, I imagine that this places a certain external pressure on them to live in accordance to a more inclusive social norm.

In contrast, how much experience do students attain of brands and social systems that are revolutionary in a new economy sense? Let alone examples of nations that have thrown GDP out the window completely. The findings indicated that the answer is in fact little to none. Being socialised in a family and schooling system embedded in an economy that is "divisive and degenerative by default" (Raworth, 2017) the students' first language is essentially *econophobic* as referred to in the discussion chapter. While they admired Vega's intentions behind encouraging them to build "healthy brands" that are driven by social value-adding purpose as opposed to profit, they were doubtful of their ability to do so in the face of huge systemic opposition, which they witnessed first-hand during part-time work experience and as they tried to affect certain changes within their own HEI. Hence, for the sake of their happiness, students choose to resign themselves to an existence of compromise where their values are subjugated to the values of the existing economic order.

## 6.2 Practical recommendations for HEIs

In conclusion, my study supports the practical recommendations of much of the education for sustainability literature:

- The incorporation of **non-discipline specific subjects** which teach the students the interconnected nature of the world beyond their discipline. These kind of subjects are seldom included in business-related degrees. At Vega the examples of this were:
  - o Critical Studies that introduces students to certain institutions that are resulting in an unsustainable economy: patriarchy, racial privilege and human domination over nature
  - o Creative Development that allowed students to learn about themselves and each other as multifaceted, creative and capable – ultimately forming a positive identity based on intrinsic self-worth.
- **Group work**, particularly where groups are not of students' choosing forces students to learn the skills of collaboration and to appreciate the value of multiple perspectives. An assumption of this is that there is diversity within the student body.
- A **"navigation" approach to teaching and learning** as opposed to the banking model of education where students are viewed as empty accounts into which knowledge is deposited. This navigation approach is extended to projects where students have a certain amount of freedom to explore issues of interest to them and gives them a sense of purpose and meaning.
- Inclusion of **case studies** and **"real world"** examples demonstrating businesses/brands/systems that are successfully incorporating new economy thinking, particularly with respect to the economic aspects. This should include making the connection between the aspirational nature of a new economy and the practical steps to get there.
- Ensuring that new economy values of the educational institute are felt as a lived experience by students.
- **Service learning and work-based learning** are recommended as a pedagogical approach within education for sustainability. Although Vega does not have a formal structure that supports this, it was evident that students are learning through part-time work that they do, hence it would be beneficial for an institute to leverage off students' experiences off campus. A lot of learning takes place there (student work/personal life experiences) that provides opportunities to explore the theory being taught in class.

An area which does not receive a lot of attention in the EFS literature, but which my findings indicated at being important, is the role of the HEI in enhancing students' **sense of agency** that they can be the change through facilitating their agency to make a difference on campus, particularly through enabling students to act as a **collective** where they will be more empowered.

As my findings indicated a huge gap between what students learn about in university and how they can apply it in practice once they begin to work, I feel that there is an opportunity for an HEI who is truly committed to creating change agents, to create something that supports students as they face opposition to new economy thinking in their work roles and together with others in the same position solutions can be sought.

I am also optimistic that the new economy movement will continue to grow in momentum and as it becomes more mainstream, policies will be created to incentivise behaviour change, consumer demand will shift and education will begin to create environments for learners to create their own wellbeing in a way that helps and not harms humanity and the planet.

### **6.3 Future research**

In Chapter 3 I discussed certain limitations of this study, which along with other features of the study suggest the need for future research:

#### **Suggested research to address limitations**

- Although the goal of my study was not be generalisable to a population but rather to reveal deep insights, as this study focuses on the experiences of a body of business students at a single institution, it does lead one to question how generalisable are these findings – i.e.: would a similar study done at other institutes result in similar findings? This leads me to recommend a number of other potential studies against which these findings can be compared:
  - o Initially I had planned on doing a multiple case study where I intended to collect data from business students of four higher education institutes that each in some way gave students the opportunity to consider the purpose of the economy and business through a different lens. I believe this could result in contrasting the effectiveness the unique pedagogical approaches used by each of these institutes. One of them for example incorporates the discipline of transcendental meditation into the students' daily routine which is said to allow them to develop their full creative potential at the same time becoming more unified with the laws of nature where they meet their own enlightened self-interest along with that of society. As I described in the literature review – a new economy paradigm requires a new consciousness and so this may prove an original avenue to explore.
  - o Another study that would be interesting is to do a similar qualitative study with business students from a university who doesn't express as explicitly as Vega to challenge the DSP. What I'd be looking out for here is how much of the findings to Research Question One are in fact as a result of the unique Vega experience or if the

changes are common to students at this age and juncture in their lives?

- Lastly, as the education for sustainability show and my findings support, the inclusion of subjects that aren't typically associated with a business degree like Creative Development and Critical Studies is important for encouraging them to be critical thinkers. It's also been said that business students are the most indoctrinated into the DSP. Therefore a comparative study with students from a humanities degree may be illuminating in terms of understanding if there is indeed a difference in how these students reflect a new economy worldview and what aspects of their education have been influential in shaping this.
- Although students do reflect certain changes in their values and worldviews now which they claim may impact their intentions to act differently in the future – it would be very interesting to see how enduring these changes are. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), intentions are the immediate antecedent of behaviour and so people are expected to carry out their intentions when the opportunity arises. However, people don't always have actual control due to external forces therefore a longitudinal study could be of interest to see how these intentions manifest into reality over the longer term and what are the factors that encourage or inhibit alumni from acting on intentions to uphold new economy thinking.
- The establishment of a shared approach to measure the presence and extent of a new economy worldview also requires further research. Although in this study I attempted to consolidate a lot of the new economy related literature and present common themes, a more extensive review would be helpful. A clearer distinction between a sustainability worldview and a new economy worldview would also be useful to future researchers – if there is indeed a meaningful distinction?
- Lastly, as I experienced how students were engaging with the subject and question of a new economy in the interview process I would like to see an action research approach taken to explore along with students the development of a new economy curriculum which empowers them to be active changemakers who are able to take on the daunting opposition of an entrenched economic system.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### **The six Principles for Responsible Management Education**

**Principle 1 | Purpose:** We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy

**Principle 2 | Values:** We will incorporate into our academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.

**Principle 3 | Method:** We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

**Principle 4 | Research:** We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.

**Principle 5 | Partnership:** We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

**Principle 6 | Dialogue:** We will facilitate and support dialog and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

## APPENDIX B

### Students interview schedule

**In terms of demographic details – I'd like to secure those before this interview – in the process of setting it up. These would include:**

Name:

Age:

Degree:

Year of completion of degree:

I attended this institute for my entire undergraduate degree: (yes/ no)

#### **Introduction – reintroduce myself and my study:**

I am a student at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business doing a Masters in Inclusive Innovation and am researching how business students' values have been shaped by their higher educational experience particularly with respects to understanding where "new economy" values have been instilled in students.

Just to reassure you - this will be a confidential interview and will take approximately 60 minutes. I will be recording this for my own research and then a research assistant, who is in no way connected to the institute you are studying at, will be transcribing it. Transcripts of the recording will only be read by me. Your personal details will be removed from the transcripts and a code name used.

Also, there are no right or wrong answers so please share with me as honestly as you can.

- Well done on making it to third year – how do you feel about entering the "real world"?
- What made you choose this particular degree? At this institute?
- How will you know if you've been successful in your career and life?
- Tell me a bit about (name) when she / he walked into (institute) in First Year? How is (name) the same and different as he / she left as a graduate?
- How do you think the you of today would be different if you'd completed the same degree at another university? Why?
- How would you describe the Vega graduate? What part of your educational experience has contributed to this?

I have a few statements that I'd like to get your thoughts on – agree/ disagree?

- *Acquiring / consuming more and more material goods does not necessarily lead to greater happiness. My prosperity is not fully dependent on my wealth*
- *Everyone is worse off in a society that exhibits high levels of inequality*
- *Business is about advantage, focus, differentiation, superiority and excellence - love and compassion have no place in for profit business*
- *We can continue to grow the economy – technological advancements will likely allow us to do so by reducing our impact on the environment.*
- .

Vega claims to produce a generation of graduates that believe:

- *that the only meaningful social, cultural and economic exchange is that which adds value to the lives of all people*
- *that the only meaningful brands are those that live this purpose by taking total responsibility for every decision they make*
- *in being conscientious and committed to social justice*

- *in being in enterprising, innovative and using their tech-savvy to be tech-smart by leveraging the power of technology to add value to society*

What are your thoughts on this? In what ways has Vega encouraged / discouraged this thinking in you?

The New Economy is a movement comprising of activists and organisations that are challenging the way the global economy works. Critics of the current economic system are blaming it for:

- the damage that has been done to the environment – climate change / extinction of plant and animal species etc
- the unequal distribution of wealth within a country like South Africa – i.e.: we have extremely poor people and very wealthy people
- Even unhappy wealthy people who aren't fulfilled / happy with all their material possessions.

They say that we need to shift towards placing concern for people, the environment and ethics at the centre of all economic / business practices. This may mean making trade-offs between big profits and overall well-being of the planet.

- What are your thoughts and opinions on this?
- How has your experience at this institute encouraged / discouraged this kind of thinking for you?
- What do you think you would need to know / experience to be persuaded and equipped to contribute to this movement?

## APPENDIX C

**Table of codes and concepts developed in analysis**

My bubble has been popped	1.1. Recognition of other ways of being	Theme 1: Awakened consciousness and conscience
I'd never engaged with x race, gender, culture prior to Vega		
I didn't know about "othering" and that I've been guilty of it		
Many perspectives exist	1.2. Valuing the other	
I've learnt to be quiet and listen		
I've learnt the importance of collaboration		
I can see now that certain things are wrong with how people treat each other	1.3. Discomfort with status quo	
Business generally operate sustainably		
I'm much more confident now and I feel comfortable to share my views		Theme 2: Self discovery
I know who I am now and have a better sense of direction		
I'more capable than I realised		
I have my own unique skills		
I want to work somewhere, where I'm valued and can be my true self	3.1 I want an authentic life	Theme 3: 3 ingredients for happiness
I want to love my job		
Certain careers and jobs are boring	3.2 I want a creative life	
Creativity is exciting		
Passionate about extra-curricular activities - I'm more than a branding student	3.3 I want a meaningful life	
I want to make a positive difference in the world - somehow		
Brands are hypocritical and yet still successful financially	4.1. The real world isn't authentic	Theme 4.Limiting beliefs
Advertising industry is manipulative		
Humans are by nature greedy and instinctively want to consume as much as possible - including me	4.2 The system is too big	
Some businesses/ industries are just too big to change		
What can I do by myself?		
How can you beat convenience?		
Doubt and pessimism - a new economy is a utopian ideal - not realistic		Theme 5. Coping Mechanisms
Doing good is a luxury		
Why not aim for the best of both worlds - money and good		
Subjects that allow me to do my own interrogation - critical studies & creative development		
I do what I can - don't wear fur / eat meat etc		

Choose brands to work on		Theme 6: Freedom to find meaning
Navigation lecturing style		
Choose execution		
Students choose to be meaningful		
Perseverance despite negative feedback		Theme 7: Challenge me to rise to expectations
Feel more capable because of hard course work / deadlines		
Lecturers know my name		Theme 8: Relationship with lecturers
Lecturers are authentic		
Lecturers discourage othering and are often other themselves		
Lecturers are supportive		
		Theme 9: Benefits of smaller classes
Favourite subjects were those that made me think differently about the world	Content	Theme 10: Curriculum: Delivering Aha! Moments
Othering, racism, patriarchy, etc		
Integration across years, across subjects within degrees	Systemic approach	
Real examples in class	Making it real	
Real brand projects		
I've learnt about myself through group projects - how do I handle diversity	Formal	Theme 11: Engagement with diversity
I've seen how the quality of solutions in projects is better with diversity	Informal	
I've made friends from so many different backgrounds		
I share opinions with people during break		
The institute embraces diversity		Theme 12: Mixed institutional values
The purpose of this HEI is profit		
My parents have good values and want me to live a good life - by the rules of today's system	The power of personal experience	Theme 13: Important external influences
Work experience has not reflected new economy values		



## APPENDIX D

### Business Model



<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>	<b>Value Proposition</b>	<b>Customer Relationships</b>	<b>Customer Segments</b>
<p>Attane WE-Africa</p> <p>Experts – social/green innovators, social/green intrapreneurs, academics</p> <p>International bodies, e.g.: PRME, INET, Sustainable brands</p> <p>Student bodies, e.g.: Oikos and local groups CHET Global Universities Network for Higher education Talloires Network Good things guys Ground up</p>	<p>Audit courses / whole institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presence of new economy values in courses</li> <li>- Staff understanding of new economy</li> <li>- Institutional embodiment of values</li> </ul> <p>Implementation plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Faculty training:</li> <li>- Support staff training</li> <li>- Management of engagement with other service providers: campus sustainability team</li> <li>- Development of unique action learning component for courses</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an online resource of new economy ventures/ initiatives in SA</li> </ul>	<p>Enhance the ability of higher education institutions to graduate “new economy” citizens and business leaders</p> <p><b>Why should they care?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student demand</li> <li>- Sustainable business need</li> <li>- Differentiator</li> <li>- Societal need</li> </ul>	<p>= Personal / customised / collaborative</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Primary: Private higher education institutes offering business degrees / diplomas / certificates</p> <p>Secondary: Public higher education institutes offering business degrees / diplomas / certificates</p>

	<b>Key Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationship with potential client</li> <li>- Relationships and networks with key partners</li> <li>- Technology platforms for audits and curriculum development</li> </ul>		<b>Channels</b> <p>Direct marketing Personal, face-to-face</p>	
<b>Cost Structure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- IP</li> <li>- Hours</li> <li>- Consumables</li> <li>- Travel / accommodation etc</li> </ul>			<b>Revenue Streams</b> <p>From institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project fee</li> <li>- Ongoing retainer</li> </ul>	